

This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

### Usage guidelines

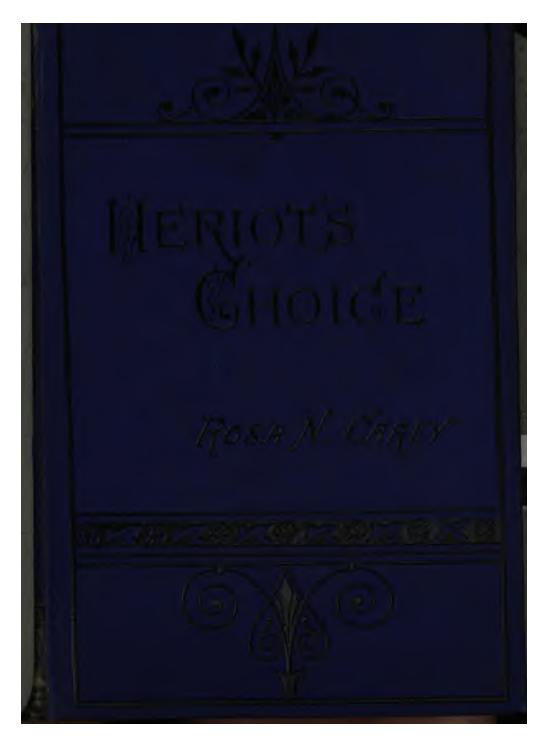
Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + Refrain from automated querying Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

### **About Google Book Search**

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at http://books.google.com/

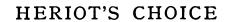








• 



•

.

•

# HERIOT'S CHOICE

## A Tale

BY

## ROSA NOUCHETTE CAREY

AUTHOR OF

"NELLIE'S MEMORIES," "WOOED AND MARRIED," ETC.



IN THREE VOLUMES.-VOL. III

### LONDON

### RICHARD BENTLEY AND 'SON

Publishers in Groinurg to Ber Mujesty the Queen

1879

[Rights of Translation Reserved]

251. f. 510.

Sungay
CLAY AND TAYLOR, PRINTERS

## CONTENTS OF VOL. III.

CHAP	TER I.			PAGE
ROYAL	• •		• •	1
CHAPT	ER II.			
"IS THAT LETTER FOR ME, A	AUNT MII	TA ; ,,		<b>2</b> 5
СНАРТ	ER III.;			
COOP KERNAN HOLE	• •			53
CHAPT	ER IV.			
DR. HERIOT'S MISTAKE	• •			79
CHAPT	ER V.			
THE COTTAGE AT FROGNAL	• •			106
CHAPT	ER VI.			
"I CANNOT SING THE OLD SO	ngs"			132
CHAPTI	ER VII.			
"WHICH SHALL IT BE?"				157

	•
v	

### CONTENTS.

CHAP!	TER VIII.			PAGE
A TALK IN FAIRLIGHT GLED	٠	• •	• •	
CHA	PTER IX.			
"YES"	• •	• •	•	<b>20</b> 8
CHA	PTER X.			
JOHN HERIOT'S WIFE	• •		• •	<b>2</b> 31
CHAI	PTER XI.			
olive's decision	• •			<b>2</b> 58
СНАІ	PTER XII.			
BERENGARIA				284

## HERIOT'S CHOICE.

### CHAPTER I.

### ROYAL.

"This would plant sore trouble
In that breast now clear,
And with meaning shadows
Mar that sun-bright face.
See that no earth-poison
To thy soul come near!
Watch! for like a serpent
Glides that heart-disgrace."

Philip Stanhope Worsley.

"My dear boy, were you hiding from us?"

Mildred had recovered from her brief shock of surprise; her heart was heavy with all manner of foreboding as she noted Royal's haggard and careworn looks, but she disguised her anxiety under a pretence of playfulness.

"Have you been masquerading under the title of Leonard du Bray, my dear?" she continued, with vol. m. 39

a little forced laugh, holding his hot hands between her own, for Rex was still Aunt Milly's darling; but he drew them irritably, almost sullenly, away. There was a lowering look on the bright face, an expression of restless misery in the blue eyes, that went to Mildred's heart.

"I am in no mood for jests," he returned, bitterly;
"do I look as though I were, Aunt Milly? Come
a little farther with me behind this wall where no
one will spy upon us."

"They have all gone to the Fox-tower, they will not be back for an hour yet. Look, the glen is quite empty, even Ary has disappeared; come and let me make you some tea, you look worn out—ill, and your hands are burning. Come, my dear, come," but Roy resisted.

"Let me alone," he returned, freeing himself angrily from her soft grasp, "I am not going to make one of the birthday party, not even to please the queen of the feast. Are you coming, Aunt Milly, or shall I go back the same way I came?"

Roy spoke rudely, almost savagely, and there was a sneer on the handsome face.

"Yes, I will follow you, Rex," returned Mildred, quietly.

What had happened to their boy-to their

ROYAL. 3

Benjamin? She walked by his side without a word, till he had found a place that suited him, a rough hillock behind a dark angle of the wall; the cotton-mill was between them and the glen.

"This will do," he said, throwing himself down on the grass, while Mildred sat down beside him. "I had to make a run for it before. Dick nearly found me out though. I meant to have gone away without speaking to one of you, but I thought you saw me."

"Rex, dear, have you got into trouble?" she asked, gently. "No, do not turn from me, do not refuse to answer me; there must be some reason for this strange behaviour, or you would not shun your best friends."

He shook his head, but did not answer.

"It cannot be anything very wrong, but we must look it in the face, Roy, whatever it is. Perhaps your father or Richard could help you better than I could, or even—" she hesitated slightly—"Dr. Heriot."

Roy started convulsively.

"He! don't mention his name. I hate—I hate him," clenching his hand, his white artist hand, as he spoke.

Mildred recoiled. Was he sane? had he been 39\*

ill and they had not known it? His fevered aspect, the restless brilliancy of his eyes, his incoherence, filled her with dismay.

"Roy, you frighten me," she said, faintly. "I believe you are ill, dear, that you do not know what you are saying," but he laughed a strange, bitter laugh.

"Ill! I wish I were; I vow I should be glad to have done with it. The life I have been leading for the last six weeks has been almost unbearable. Do you recollect you once told me that I should take trouble badly, that I was a moral coward and should give in sooner than other men? Well, you were a true prophet, Aunt Milly."

"Dear Roy, I am trying to be patient, but do you know, you are torturing me with this suspense."

He laughed again, and patted her hand half-kindly, half-carelessly.

"You need not look so alarmed, mother Milly," his pet name for her, "I have not forged a cheque, or put my name to a bill, or got into any youthful scrape. The trouble is none of my making. I am only a coward, and can't face it as Dick would if he were in my place, and so I thought I would come and have a look at you all before I went away for a long, long time. I was pretty near you all

ROYAL. 5

the time you were at dinner, and heard all Dad's stories. It is laughable, isn't it, Aunt Milly?" but the poor lad's face contracted with a look of hopeless misery as he spoke.

"My dear, I am so glad," returned Mildred, in a reassured tone; "never mind the trouble; trouble can be borne, so that you have done nothing wrong. But I feared I hardly know what, you looked and spoke so mysteriously; and then, remember we have heard nothing about you for so long, even Polly's letters have been unanswered."

"Did she say so? did she mind it? What does she think, Aunt Milly?"

"She has not complained, at least to me, but she has looked very wistful I notice at post-time; once or twice I fancied your silence a little damped her happiness."

"She is happy then? what an ass I was to doubt it," he groaned; "as though she could be proof against the fascinations of a man like Dr. Heriot; but oh! Polly, Polly, I never could have believed you would have thrown me over like this," and Roy buried his face in his hands with a hoarse sob as he spoke.

Mildred sat almost motionless with surprise.

Strange to say, she had not in the least realised

the truth; perhaps her own trouble had a little deadened her quick instinct of sympathy, or Roy's apparently brotherly affection had deceived her, but she had never guessed the secret of his silence. He had seemed such a boy too, so light-hearted, that she could hardly even now believe him the victim of a secret and hopeless attachment.

And then the complication. Mildred smiled again, a little smile; there was something almost ludicrous she thought in the present aspect of affairs. Was it predestined that in the Lambert family the course of true love would not run smooth? Richard, refused by the woman he had loved from childhood, she herself innocent, but self-betrayed, wasting strangely under the daily torture she bore with such outward patience, and now Roy, breaking his heart for the girl he had never really wooed.

"Rex, dear, I have been very stupid, but I never guessed this," waking up from her bitter reverie as another and another hoarse sob smote upon her ear. Poor lad, he had been right in asserting himself morally unfit to cope with any great trouble; weak and yet sensitive, he had succumbed at once to the blow that had shattered his happiness. "Hush, you must bear this like a man for her sake—for Polly's sake," she whispered, bending over

him and trying to unclench his fingers. "Rex, there is more than yourself to think about."

"Is that all you have to say to me?" he returned, starting up; "is that how you comfort people whose hearts are broken, Aunt Milly? How do you know what I feel, what I suffer, or how I hate him who has robbed me of my Polly? for she is mine—she is—she ought to be by every law, human and divine," he continued, in the same frenzied voice.

"Hush, this is wrong, you must not talk so," replied Mildred, in the firm soothing voice with which she would have controlled a passionate child. "Sit down by me again, Rex, and we will talk about this," but he still continued his restless strides without heeding her.

"Who says she loves him? Let him give me my fair chance and see which she will choose. It will not be he, I warrant you. Polly's heart is here—here," striking himself on the breast, "but she is too young to know it, and he has taken a mean advantage of her ignorance. You have all been against me, every one of you," continued the poor boy, in a tone so sullen and despairing that it wrung Mildred's heart. "You knew I loved her, that I always loved her, and yet you never gave

me a hint of this; you have been worse than any enemy to me; it was cruel—cruel!"

"For shame, Rex, how dare you speak to Aunt Milly so!"—and Richard suddenly turned the angle of the wall and confronted his brother.

"I heard your voice and the last sentence, and—and I guess the rest, Rex," and Richard's wrathful voice softened, and he laid his hand on Roy's shoulder.

The other looked at him piteously.

"Are they all with you? have you brought them to gloat over my misery? Speak out like a man, Dick, is Dr. Heriot behind that wall? I warn you, I am in a dangerous mood."

"No one is with me," returned Richard, in a tone of forced composure, "they are in the woods a long way off still; I came back to see what had become of Aunt Milly. You are playing us a sorry trick, Rex, to be hiding away like this; it is childish, unmanly to the last degree."

"Ah, you nearly found me out once before, Dick; Polly was with you. I had a good sight of her sweet face then, the little traitor. I saw the diamonds on her finger. You little knew who Leonard was. Ah, ha!" and Roy wrenched

himself from his brother's grasp as he had done from Mildred's, and resumed his restless walk.

"We must get him away," whispered Mildred.

Richard nodded, and then he went up and spoke very gently to Roy.

"I know all about it, Rex; we must think what must be done. But we cannot talk here, some one else will be sure to find us out, and you are not in a fit state for any discussion; you must come home with me at once."

"Why so?"

Richard hesitated and coloured as though with shame. Rex burst again into noisy laughter.

"You think I am not myself, eh! that I have had a little of the devil's liquor," but Richard's grave pitying glance subdued him. "Don't be hard on me, Dick, it was the first time, and I was so horribly weak and had dragged myself for miles, and I wanted strength to see her again. I hated it even as I took it, but it has answered its purpose."

"Richard, oh, Richard!" and at Mildred's tone of anguish Richard went up to her and put his arms round her.

"You must leave him to me, Aunt Milly. I

must take him home; he has excited himself and taken what is not good for him, and so he cannot control himself as well as usual. Of course it is wrong, but he did not mean it I am sure. Poor Rex, he will repent of it bitterly to-morrow if I can only persuade him to leave this place."

But Mildred's tears had already sobered Roy; his manner as he stood looking at them was half ashamed and half resentful.

"Why are you both so hard on me?" he burst out at last; "when a fellow's heart is broken he is not always as careful as he should be. I felt so deadly faint climbing the hill in the sun that I took too much of what they offered as a restorative; only Dick is such a saint that he can't make allowances for people."

"I will make every allowance if you will only come home with me now," pleaded his brother.

"Where—home? Oh, Dick, you should not ask it," returned Roy, turning very pale; "I cannot, I must not go home while she is there. I should be tray myself—it would be worse than madness."

"He is right," assented Mildred; "he must go back to London, but you cannot leave him, Richard."

"Yes, back to London, Jericho if you will, it is all one and the same to me since I have lost my Polly. I left my traps at an inn five miles from here where I slept, or rather woke, last night. I shouldn't wonder if you have to carry me on your back, Dick, or leave me lying by the road-side, if that faintness comes on again."

"I must get out the wagonette," continued Richard, in a sorely perplexed voice, "there's no help for it. Listen to me, Rex. You do not wish to bring unhappiness to two people besides yourself, you are too good-hearted to injure any one."

"Is not that why I am hiding?" was the irritable answer, "only first Aunt Milly and then you come spying on me. If I could have got away I should have done it an hour ago, but, as ill-luck would have it, I fell over a stone and hurt my foot."

"Thank Heaven that we are all of the same mind! that was spoken like yourself, Rex. Now we have not a moment to lose, they cannot be much longer; I must get out the horses myself, as Thomas will be at his sister's, and it will be better for him to know nothing. Follow me to the farm as quickly as you can, while Aunt Milly goes back to the glen."

Roy nodded, his violence had ebbed away, and

he was far too miserable and subdued to dispute his brother's will. When Richard left them he lingered a moment by Mildred's side.

"I was a brute to you just now, Aunt Milly, but I know you will forgive me."

"It was not you, my dear, it was your misery that spoke;" and as a faint gleam woke in his eyes as though her kindness touched him, she continued earnestly—"Be brave, Rex, for all our sakes; think of your mother, and how she would have counselled you to bear this trouble."

They were standing side by side as Mildred spoke, and she had her hand on his shoulder, but a rustling in the steep wooded bank above them arrested all further speech—her fingers closed nervously on his coat-sleeve.

"Hush! what was that! not Richard?"

Roy shook his head, but there was no time to answer or to draw back into the shelter of the old wall; they were even now perceived. Light footsteps crunched over the dead leaves, there was the shimmer of a blue dress, a bright face peeped at them between the branches, and then with a low cry of astonishment Polly sprang down the bank.

"Be brave, Rex, and think only of her."

Mildred had no time to whisper more, as the

ROYAL. 13

girl ran up to them and caught hold of Roy's two hands with an exclamation of pleasure.

"Dear Roy, this is so good of you, and on my birthday too. Was Aunt Milly in your secret? did she contrive this delightful surprise? I shall scold you both presently, but not now. Come, they are all waiting; how they will enjoy the fun," and she was actually trying to drag him with gentle force, but the poor lad resisted her efforts.

"I can't—don't ask me, Polly; please let me go. There, I did not mean to hurt your soft, pretty hand, but you must not detain me. Aunt Milly will tell you; at least there is nothing to tell, only I must go away again," finished Roy, turning away, not daring to look at her, the muscles of his face quivering with uncontrollable emotion.

Polly gave a terrified glance at both; even Aunt Milly looked strangely guilty, she thought.

"Yes, let him go, Polly," pleaded Mildred.

"What does it all mean, Aunt Milly? is he ill, or has something happened? Why does he not look at me?" cried the girl, in a pained voice.

Roy cast an appealing glance at Mildred to help him; the poor fellow's strength was failing under the unexpected ordeal, but Mildred's urgent whisper, "Go by all means, leave her to me," reached Polly's quick ear.

"Why do you tell him to go?" she returned resentfully, interposing herself between them. "You shall not go, Roy, till you have looked at me and told me what has happened. Why, his hand is cold and shaking, just as yours did that hot night, Aunt Milly," and Polly held it in both hers in her simple affectionate way. "Have you been ill, Roy? no one has told us;" but her lips quivered as though she had found him greatly changed.

"Yes—no; I believe I must be ill;" but Mildred, truthful woman, interposed—

"He has not been ill, Polly, but something has occurred to vex him, and he is not quite himself just now. He has told Richard and me, and we think the best thing will be for him to go away a little while until the difficulty lessens." Mildred was approaching dangerously near the truth, but she knew how hard it would be for Polly's childish mind to grasp it, unless Roy were weak enough to betray himself. His working features, his strange incoherence, had already terrified the girl beyond measure.

"What difficulty, Aunt Milly? If Roy is in

trouble we must help him to bear it. It was wrong of you and Richard to tell him to go away. He looks ill enough for us to nurse and take care of him. Rex, dear, you will come home with us, will you not?"

"No, she says right; I must go," he returned, hoarsely. "I was wrong to come here at all, but I could not help myself. Dear Polly, indeed—indeed I must; Dick is waiting for me."

- "And when will you come again?"
- "I cannot tell—not yet."
- "And you will go away; you will leave me on my birthday without a kind word, without wishing me joy? and you never even wrote to me." And now the tears seemed ready to come.
- "This is past man's endurance," groaned Roy.
  "Polly, if you cared for me you would not torture
  me like this." And he turned so deadly pale that
  even Mildred grew alarmed. "I will say anything
  you like if you will only let me go."
- "Tell me you are glad, that you are pleased; you know what I mean," stammered Polly. She had hung her head, and the strange paleness and excitement were lost on her, as well as the fierce light that had come in Roy's eyes.

"For shame, Polly! after all, you are just like

. . 1

other women—I believe you like to test your power. So I am to wish you joy of your John Heriot, eh?"

"Yes, Rex. I have so missed your congratulation."

"Well, you shall have it now. How do people wish each other joy on these auspicious occasions? We are not sister and brother—not even cousins. I have never kissed you in my life, Polly-never once; but now I suppose I may." He snatched her to him as he spoke with an impetuous, almost violent movement, but as he stooped his head over her he suddenly drew back. "No, you are Heriot's now, Polly-we will shake hands." And as she looked up at him, scared and sorely perplexed, his lips touched her bright hair, softly, reverently. "There, he will not object to that. Bless you, Polly! Don't forget me—don't forget your old friend Roy. Now I must go, dear." And as she still held him half unconsciously, he quickly disengaged himself and limped painfully away.

Mildred watched till he had disappeared, and then she came up to the girl, who was standing looking after him with blank, wide-open eyes.

"Come, Polly, they will be waiting for us, you know." But there was no sign of response.

"They will be seeking us everywhere," continued Mildred. "The sun has set, and my brother will be faint and tired with his long day. Come, Polly, rouse yourself; we shall have need of all our wits."

"What did he mean?—I do not understand, Aunt Milly. Why was it wrong for him to kiss me?—Richard did. What made him so strange? He frightened me; he was not like Roy at all."

"People are not like themselves when something is troubling them. I know all about Roy's difficulty; it will not always harass him. Perhaps he will write to us, and then we shall feel happier."

"Why did he not tell me himself?" returned the girl, plaintively. "No one has ever come between us before. Roy tells me everything; I know all his fancies, only they never come to anything. It is very hard that Polly is to be less to him now."

"It is the way of the world, little one," returned Mildred, gravely. "Roy cannot expect to monopolise you now that another has a claim on your time and thoughts."

"But Dr. Heriot would not mind. You do not know him, Aunt Milly. He is so good, so above all that sort of thing. He always said that he thought our friendship for each other so unique

and beautiful—he understood me so well when I said Roy was just like my own, own brother."

"Dear Polly, you must not fret if Roy does not see it in quite the same light at first," continued Mildred, hesitating. "He may feel—I do not say he does—as though he has lost a friend."

"I will write and undeceive him," she returned, eagerly. "He shall not think that for a moment. But no, that will not explain all his sorrowful looks and strangeness. He seemed as though he wanted to speak, and yet he shunned me. Oh, Aunt Milly, what shall I do? How can I be happy and at ease now I know Roy is in trouble?"

"Polly, you must listen to me," returned Mildred, taking her hand firmly, but secretly at her wits' end; even now she could hear voices calling to them from the farther side of the glen. "This little complication—this difficulty of Roy's—demands all our tact. Roy will not like the others to know he has been here."

"No! Are you sure of that, Aunt Milly?" fixing her large dark eyes on Mildred.

"Quite sure—he told me so himself; so we must guard his confidence, you and I. I must make some excuse for Richard, who will be back

presently; and you must help me to amuse the others, and make time pass till he comes back."

"Will he be long gone? What is he doing with Roy?" pushing back her hair with strangely restless fingers—a trick of Polly's when in trouble or perplexity; but Mildred smoothed the thick wild locks reprovingly

"He will drive him for a mile or two until they meet some vehicle; he will not be longer than he can help. Roy has hurt his foot, and cannot walk well, and is tired besides."

"Tired! he looks worn out; but perhaps we had better not talk any more now, Aunt Milly," continued Polly, brushing some furtive tears from her eyes; "there is Dr. Heriot coming to find us."

"We were just going to scour the woods for you two," he observed, eyeing their discomposed faces, half comically and half anxiously. "Were you still looking for Leonard du Bray?" But as Polly faltered and turned crimson under his scrutinising glance, Mildred answered for her.

"Polly was looking for me, I believe. We have been sad truants, I know, and shall be punished by cold tea."

- "And Richard—have you not seen Richard?" he demanded in surprise.
- "Yes, but he left me before Polly made her appearance; he has gone farther on, and will be back presently. Polly is dreadfully tired, I am afraid," she continued, as she saw how anxiously he was eyeing the girl's varying colour; but Polly, weary and over-anxious, answered with unwonted irritability—
- "Every one is tired, more or less; these days are apt to become stupid in the end."
- "Well, well," he returned, kindly, "you and Aunt Milly shall rest and have your tea, and I will walk up to the farm and order the wagonette; it is time for us to be going."
- "No, no!" exclaimed Polly, in sudden fright at the mistake she had made. "Have you forgotten your promise to show us the glen in the moonlight?"
- "But, my child, you are so tired." But she interrupted him.
- "I am not tired at all," she said, contradicting herself. "Aunt Milly, make him keep his promise. One can only have one birthday in a year, and I must have my own way in this."
  - "I shall take care you have it very seldom," he

returned, fondly. But she only shivered and averted her face in reply.

During the hour that followed, while they waited in suspense for Richard, Polly continued in the same variable mood. She laughed and talked feverishly; a moment's interval in the conversation seemed to oppress her; when, in the twilight, Dr. Heriot's hand approached hers with a caressing movement, she drew herself away almost petulantly, and then went on with her nonsense.

Mildred's brow furrowed with anxiety as she watched them. She could see Dr. Heriot was perplexed as well as pained by the girl's fitful mood, though he bore it with his usual gentleness. After her childish repulse he had been a little silent, but no one but Mildred had noticed it.

The others were talking merrily among themselves. Olive and Mr. Marsden were discussing the merits and demerits of various Christian names which according to their ideas were more or less euphonious. The subject seemed to interest Dr. Heriot, and during a pause he turned to Polly, and said, in a half-laughing, half-serious tone—

"Polly, when we are married, do you always mean to call me Dr. Heriot?"

For a moment she looked up at him with almost

a scared expression. "Yes, always," she returned at last, very quietly.

"But why so, my child," he replied, gravely, amusing himself at her expense, "when John Heriot is my name?"

"Because—because—oh, I don't know," was the somewhat distressed answer. "Heriot is very pretty, but John—only Aunt Milly likes John; she says it is beautiful—her favourite name."

It was only one of Polly's random speeches, and at any other time would have caused Mildred little embarrassment, but anxious, jaded, and weary as she was, her feelings were not so well under control, and as Dr. Heriot raised his eyes with a pleased expression as though to hear it corroborated by her own lips, a burning blush, that seemed to scorch her, suddenly rose to her face.

"Polly, how can you be so foolish?" she began, with a trace of real annoyance in her clear tones; but then she stopped, and corrected herself with quiet good sense. "I believe, after all, it is my favourite name. You know it belonged to the beloved disciple."

"Thank you," was Dr. Heriot's low reply, and the subject dropped; but Mildred, sick at heart,

23

wondered if her irritability had been noticed. The pain of that dreadful blush seemed to scorch her still. What would he think of her?

Her fears were not quite groundless. Dr. Heriot had noticed her sudden embarrassment, and had quickly changed the subject; but more than once that night he went over the brief conversation, and questioned himself as to the meaning of that strange sudden flush on Mildred Lambert's face.

Most of the party were growing weary of their enforced stay, when Richard at last made his appearance in the glen. The moon had risen, the heavy autumnal damps had already saturated the place, the gipsy fire had burnt down to its las ember, and Ary sat shivering beside it in her red cloak.

Richard's apologies were ample and sounded sincere, but he offered no explanation of his strange desertion. The wagonette was waiting, he said, and they had better lose no time in packing up. He thought even Polly must have had enough of her beloved cotton-mill.

Polly made no answer; with Richard's reappearance her forced spirits seemed to collapse; she stood by listlessly while the others lifted the ham-

pers and wraps; when the little cavalcade started she followed with a step so slow and flagging that Dr. Heriot paused more than once.

"Oh, Heartsease, how tired you are!" he said, pityingly, "and I have not a hand to give you. Wrap yourself in my plaid, darling. I have seen you shiver more than once." But she shook her head, and the plaid still trailed from her arm over the dewy grass.

But Mildred noticed one thing. She saw, when the wagonette had started along the dark country road, that Dr. Heriot had taken the plaid and wrapped it round the weary girl; but she saw something else—she saw Polly steal timidly closer to the side of her betrothed husband, saw the kind arm open to receive her, and the little pale face suddenly lay itself down on it with a look of weariness and grief that went to her heart.

### CHAPTER II.

"IS THAT LETTER FOR ME, AUNT MILLY?"

"When dark days have come, and friendship Worthless seemed, and life in vain, That bright friendly smile has sent me Boldly to my task again;

It has smiled on my successes,
Raised me when my hopes were low,
And by turns has looked upon me
With all the loving eyes I know."

Adelaide Anne Proctor.

THERE was a long troubled talk between Mildred and Richard that night. Richard, who had borne his own disappointment so bravely, seemed utterly downcast on his brother's account.

"I would rather have had this happen to any of us but Roy," he said, walking up and down Mildred's room that night.

"Hush, Richard, she will hear us," returned Mildred, anxiously; and then he came and rested his elbow on the sill beside her, and they talked in a low subdued key, looking over the shadowy fells and the broad level of moonlight that lay beneath them.

"You do not know Roy as well as I do. I believe he is physically as well as morally unfit to cope with a great sorrow; where other men fight, he succumbs too readily."

"You have your trouble too, Cardie; he should remember that."

"I have not lost hope, Aunt Milly," he returned, gravely. "I am happier than Rex—far happier; for it is no wrong for me to love Ethel. I have a right to love her, so long as no one else wins her. Roy will have it Polly has jilted him for Heriot."

"Jilted him! that child!"

"Yes, he maintains that she loves him best, only that she is unconscious of her own feelings. He declares that to his belief she has never really given her heart to Heriot. I am afraid he is right in declaring the whole thing has been patched up too hastily. It has always seemed to me as though Polly were too young to know her own mind."

"Some girls are married at eighteen."

"Yes, but not Polly; look what a child she is, and how quiet a life she has led for the last three years; she has seen no one but ourselves, Marsden,

"IS THAT LETTER FOR ME, AUNT MILLY?" 27 and Heriot; do you know, gentle as he is, she seems half afraid of him."

"That is only natural in her position."

"You think it does not augur want of love? Well, you may be right; I only profess to understand one girl,"—with a sigh—"and I can read her like a book; but Roy, Aunt Milly—what must we do about Roy?"

Mildred shook her head dejectedly.

"He must not come here under the circumstances, it would not be possible or right; he has done mischief enough already."

"Surely he did not betray himself?" in Richard's sternest voice; "he assured me over and over again that he had not said a word which Dr. Heriot might not hear."

"No; he commanded himself wonderfully; he only forgot himself once, and then, poor lad, he recollected himself in time,—but she must have noticed how badly it went with him—there was heart-break in his face."

"I had sad work with him for the first two miles," returned Richard. "I was half afraid of leaving him at all, he looked and spoke so wildly, only my threat of telling my father brought him to reason; he begged—he implored me to keep his

:

secret, and that no one but you and I should ever know of his madness."

"There would be nothing gained by telling my brother," returned Mildred.

"Certainly not; it would be perfectly useless, and fret him beyond measure; he would take Roy's trouble to heart, and have no pleasure in anything. How thankful I am, Aunt Milly, that I have already planned my London journey for the day after to-morrow."

"Yes, indeed, I shall feel easier when he is under your care."

"I must invent some excuse for being absent most of the day to-morrow; I cannot bear to think of him shut up in that wretched inn, and unable to stir out for fear of being recognised. He walked very lame, I remember; I must find out if he has really injured his foot."

"Do you think I might go with you, Cardie?" for Mildred was secretly yearning to comfort her boy, but Richard instantly put a veto on her proposal.

"It would not be safe, Aunt Milly; it will excite less questioning if I go alone; you must be content to trust him to me. I will bring you a faithful "IS THAT LETTER FOR ME, AUNT MILLY?" 29 report to-morrow evening;" and as Mildred saw the wisdom of the reasoning she resolved to abide by it.

But she passed a miserable night. Roy's haggard face and fierce reckless speeches haunted her. She dreaded to think of the time when Richard would be obliged to return to Oxford, and leave Roy to battle alone with his misery. She wondered what Richard would think if she were to propose going up to him for a month or two; she was becoming conscious herself of a need of change,—a growing irritability of the nerves chafed her calm spirit, daily suffering and suppression were wearing the brave heart sadly. Mildred, who ailed nothing ordinarily, had secret attacks of palpitation and faintness, which would have caused alarm if any one had guessed it, but she kept her own counsel.

Once, indeed, Dr. Heriot had questioned her. "You do not look as well as you used, Miss Lambert; but I suppose I am not to be consulted?" and Mildred had shaken her head laughingly. But here was work for the ministering woman — to forget her own strange sorrow in caring for another;—Roy needed her more than any one;

Olive could be safely left in charge of the others. Mildred fell asleep at last planning long winter evenings in the young artist's studio.

The next day seemed more than usually long. Polly, who looked as though she had not slept all night, spent her time in listlessly wandering about the house and garden, much to Olive's mild wonder.

"I do wish you would get something to do, Polly," she said more than once, looking up from her writing-table at the sound of the tapping heels; "you have not practised those pieces Dr. John ordered from London."

"Olive is right; you should try and occupy yourself, my dear," observed Mildred, looking up from her marking; piles of socks lay neatly beside her, Mr. Lambert's half-stitched wristband was in her lap. She looked with soft reproving eyes at poor restless Polly, her heart all the time very full of pity.

"How can you ask me to play?" returned Polly, in a resentful tone. Play when Roy was ill or in some dreadful trouble—was that their love for him? When Mildred next looked up the girl was no longer standing watching her with sad eyes; across the beck, through the trees, she could see the

"is that letter for me, aunt milly?" 31

shimmer of a blue dress; a forlorn young figure strolled aimlessly down the field path and paused by the weir. Of what was she thinking? Were her thoughts at all near the truth—"Don't forget me, think of your old friend Roy!"—were those words, said in the saddest voice she had ever heard, still ringing in her ears?

It was late in the evening when Richard returned, and he beckoned Mildred softly out of the room. Polly, who was sitting beside Dr. Heriot, followed them with wistful eyes, but neither of them noticed her.

Richard gave a very unsatisfactory report. He found Roy looking ill in body as well as in mind, and suffering great pain from his foot, which was severely contused, though he obstinately refused to believe anything was really the matter, and had firmly declared his intention of accompanying his brother to London. His excitement had quite subsided, but the consequent depression was very great. Richard believed he had not slept, from the pain of his foot and mental worry, and being so near home only made his desolation harder to bear.

He had pencilled a little line to Polly, which he had begged Richard to bring with his love, and at the same time declared he would never see her again when she was once Dr. Heriot's wife; and, when Richard had remonstrated against the weakness and moral cowardice of adopting such a line of action, had flamed up into his old fierceness; she had made him an exile from his home and all that he loved, he had no heart now for his profession, he knew his very hand had lost its cunning; but not for that could he love her the less or wish her ill. "She is Polly after all," he had finished piteously, "the only girl I ever loved or cared to love, and now she is going near to spoil my whole life!"

"It was useless to argue with him," Richard said; "everything like advice seemed to irritate him, and no amount of sympathy could lull the intolerable pain; he found it answer better to remain silent and let him talk out his trouble, without trying to stem the bitter current." It went to Mildred's heart to hear how the poor lad at the last had broken down utterly at bidding his brother good-bye.

"Don't leave me, Dick, I am not fit to be left," he had said; and then he had thrown himself down on the miserable couch, and had hidden his face in his arms.

<sup>&</sup>quot;And the note, Richard?"

"IS THAT LETTER FOR ME, AUNT MILLY?" 33

"Here it is; he said you might read it, that there was not a word in it that the whole world might not see—she could show it to Heriot if she liked."

"All the same, I wish he had not written it," returned Mildred, doubtfully, as she unfolded the slip of paper.

"Dear Polly," it began, "I fear you must have thought me very strange and unkind last evening —your reproachful eyes are haunting me now, cannot bear you to misunderstand me. one shall come between us.' Ah, I remember you said that; it was so like you, dear—so like my Polly! Now you must try not to think hardly of me—a great trouble has befallen me, as Aunt Milly and Richard know, and I must go away to bear it; no one can help me to bear it; your little fingers cannot lighten it, Polly --- your sympathy could not avail me; it is my own burthen, and I must bear it alone. You must not fret if we do not meet for some time—it is better so, far better. I have my work; and, dear, I pray that you may be very happy with the man you love (if he be the one you love, Polly). "

"Oh, Richard, he ought not to have said that!"

"She will not understand; go on, Aunt Milly."

"But there can be no doubt of that, he is a good man, almost worthy of my Polly; but I must not say that any longer, for you are Heriot's Polly now, are you not? but whose ever you are, God bless you, dear.—Roy."

Mildred folded the letter sadly.

"He has betrayed himself in every line," she said, slowly and thoughtfully. "Richard, it will break my heart to do it, but I think Polly ought not to see this; we must keep it from her, and one day we must tell Roy."

"I was afraid you might say so, but if you knew how he pleaded that this might be given to her; he seemed to think it would hinder her fretting. 'She cares for me more than any of you know—more than she knows herself,' he said, as he urged me to take it."

"What must we do? It will set her thinking. No, Richard, it is too venturesome an experiment."

But Mildred's wise precautions were doomed to be frustrated, for at that moment Polly quietly opened the door and confronted them.

The two conspirators moved apart somewhat guiltily.

"Am I interrupting you? I knocked, but no one answered. Aunt Milly looks disconcerted,"

"is that letter for me, aunt milly?" 35

said Polly, eyeing them both with keen inquisitive glance. "I—I only wanted to know if Richard has brought me a message or note from Roy?"

Richard hesitated and looked at Mildred. This business was making him anxious; he would fain wash his hands of it.

"Why do you not answer?" continued the girl, palpitating a little. "Is that letter for me, Aunt Milly?" and as Mildred reluctantly handed it to her, a reproachful colour overspread Polly's face.

"Were you keeping this from me? I thought people's letters were sacred property," continued the little lady, proudly. "I did not think you could do such a thing, Aunt Milly."

"Dear Polly!" remonstrated Richard; but Mildred interposed with quiet dignity—

"Polly should be just, even though she is unhappy. Roy wished me to read his letter, and I have done so."

"Forgive me!" returned Polly, almost melting into tears. "I know I ought not to have spoken so, but it has been such a miserable day," and she leant against Mildred as she read the note.

She read it once—twice—without comment, and then her features began to work.

- "Dear Aunt Milly, how unhappy he is—he—Roy; he cannot have done anything wrong?"
  - "No, no, my precious; of course not!"
  - "Then why must we not help him to bear it?"
- "We can pray for him, Polly."
- "Yes, yes, but I cannot understand it," piteously.
  "I have always been Roy's friend always, and now he has made Richard and you his confidants."
- "We are older and wiser, you see," began Richard, with glib hypocrisy, which did not become him.

Polly stamped her little foot with impatience.

- "Don't, Richard. I will not have you talk to me as though I were a child. I have a right to know this; you are all treating me badly. Roy would have told me, I know he would, if Aunt Milly had not come between us!" and she darted a quick reproachful look at Mildred.
- "It is Polly who is hard on us, I think," returned Mildred, putting her arm gently round the excited girl; and at the fond tone Polly's brief wrath evaporated.
- "I cannot help it," she returned, hiding her face on Mildred's shoulder; "it is all so wretched, everything is spoiled. Roy is not pleased that I am going to be married, he seems angry—put out

"IS THAT LETTER FOR ME, AUNT MILLY?" 37

about it; it is not that—it cannot be that that is the matter with him? Why do you not answer?" she continued, impatiently, looking at them both with wide-open innocent eyes. "Roy cannot be jealous?"

Mildred would have given worlds to have been able to answer No, but, unused to evasion of any kind, the prudent falsehood died a natural death upon her lips.

"My dear Polly, what makes you so fanciful?" she began with difficulty; but it was enough,—Mildred's face could not deceive, and that moment's hesitating silence revealed the truth to the startled girl, her faithful friend was hurt, jealous.

"You see yourself that Rex wants you to be happy," continued Mildred, somewhat inconsequently.

"I shall be happy if he be so—not unless," replied the girl, a little sadly.

Her pretty pink colour had faded, her hands dropped from Mildred's shoulder; she stood for a long time quiet with her lips apart, her young head drooping almost to her breast.

"Shall you answer his letter, Polly?" asked Richard at last, trying to rouse her.

"Yes-no," she faltered, turning very pale.

"Give my love to him, Richard—my dear love. I—I will write presently," and so saying, she slowly and dejectedly left the room.

"Aunt Milly, do you think she guesses?" whispered Richard, when she had gone.

"Heaven only knows, Richard! This is a wretched business; there seems nothing but trouble everywhere," and Mildred almost wrung her hands. Richard thought he had never seen her so agitated—so unlike herself.

The days and weeks that followed tried Mildred sorely; heavy autumnal rains had set in, wet grass, dripping foliage, heaps of rotting leaves saturated with moisture, met her eyes daily. A sunless, lurid atmosphere bounded everything; by and by the rain ceased, and a merciless wind drove across the fells, drying up the soddened pools, whirling the last red leaves from the bare stems, and threatening to beat in the vicarage windows.

A terrible scarping wind, whose very breath was bitterness to flesh and blood, blatant and unresting, filling the valley with a strange voice and life.

The river was full to the brim now, the brown water that rushed below the terrace carried away sticks and branches, and light eddying leaves;

"IS THAT LETTER FOR ME, AUNT MILLY?" 39 great fires roared up the vicarage chimneys, while the girls sat and shivered beside them.

Those nights were terrible to Mildred—the wild stir and tumult, the fury of the great rushing wind, fevered her blood with strange excitement, and drove sleep from her pillow, or, when weariness overcame her, haunted her brain with painful images.

Never had the tranquil soul so lacked tranquillity, never had daily life, never had the manyfolded hours, held such torture for her.

"I must have change, or I shall be ill," she thought, as she contemplated her wan and bloodless exterior morning after morning. "Anything but that—anything but having him pitying me."

Relief by his hand might be sweet indeed; but a doubt of her own power of self-control, should weakness seize upon her, oppressed her like a nightmare, and the longing to escape from her daily ordeal of suffering amounted to actual agony.

Morning after morning she opened Richard's letters, in the hope that her proposal had been accepted, but each morning some new delay or object fretted her.

Richard had remained in London up to the last

possible moment. Roy's injured foot had rendered him dependent on his brother's nursing; his obstinacy had led to a great deal of unnecessary delay and suffering; wakeful and harassed nights had undermined his strength, and made him so nervous and irritable by day, that only patience and firm management could effect any improvement; he was so reckless that it required coaxing to induce him to take the proper remedies, or to exert himself in the least; he had not yet roused himself, or resumed his painting, and all remonstrances were at present unavailing.

Mildred sighed over this fresh evidence of Roy's weakness and instability of purpose, and then she remembered that he was suffering, perhaps ill. No one knew better than herself the paralysing effects on will and brain caused by anxiety and want of sleep; some stimulus, stronger than she or Richard could administer, was needful to rouse Roy's dormant energies.

Help came when they had least looked for it.

"Is Roy painting anything now?" asked Polly suddenly, one day, when she was alone with Mildred.

[Mildred was writing to Richard; his last letter lay open beside her on the table. Polly had

glanced at it once or twice, but she had not questioned Mildred concerning its contents. Polly had fallen into very quiet ways lately; the pretty pink colour had never returned to her face, the light footstep was slower now, the merry laugh was less often heard, a sweet wistful smile had replaced it; she was still the same busy active Polly, gentle and affectionate, as of old, but some change, subtle yet undefinable, had passed over the girl. Dr. Heriot liked the difference, even though he marvelled at it. "Polly is looking quite the woman," he would say presently. Mildred paused, a little startled over Polly's abrupt question.]

"Richard does not say; it is not in his letter, my dear," she stammered.

"Not in this one, perhaps, but in his last," persisted Polly. "Try to remember, Aunt Milly; how does Richard say that Rex occupies himself?"

"I am afraid he is very idle," returned Mildred, reluctantly.

Polly coloured, and looked distressed.

"But his foot is better; he is able to stand, is he not?"

"I believe so. Richard certainly said as much as that."

"Then it is very wrong for him to be losing





IILL ad 1 3. ] e pr ice, augl rej ly, ę ge, I e mi ıan,' litt t in n hi r, A jupic 3turi ressc able inly: him

time like this; he will not have his picture in the Academy after all. Some one ought to write and remind him," faltered Polly, with a little heat.

"I have done so more than once, and Richard is for ever lecturing. Roy is terribly desultory, I am afraid."

"Indeed you are wrong, Aunt Milly," persisted the girl earnestly. "Roy loves his work—dearly dearly—it is only his foot, and—" she broke down, recovered herself, and hurried on—

"I think it would be a good thing if Dad Fabian were to go and talk to him. I will write to him—yes, and I will write to Roy."

Mildred did not venture to dissuade her; she had a notion that perhaps Polly's persuasion might be more efficacious than Richard's arguments. She took it quite as a matter of course, when, half an hour later, Polly laid the little note down beside her.

"There, you may read it," she said, hurriedly. "Let it go in Richard's letter; he may read it too, if he likes."

It was very short, and covered the tiniest sheet of note-paper; the pretty handwriting was not quite so steady as usual.

"My dearest brother Roy," it began-never had

"is that letter for me, aunt milly?" 43

she called him that before—"I have never written to thank you for your note. It was a dear, kind note, and I love you for writing it; do not be afraid of my misunderstanding or thinking you unkind; you could not be that to any one. I am so thankful your poor foot is better; it has been terrible to think of your suffering all this time. I am so afraid it must have interfered with your painting, and that you have not got on well with the picture you began when you were here. Roy, dear, you must promise to work at it harder than ever, and as soon as you are able. I am sure it will be the best picture you have ever done, and I have set my heart on seeing it in the Academy next year; but unless you work your hardest, there will be no chance of I have asked Dad Fabian to come and that. lecture you. You and he must have one of your clever art-talks, and then you must get out your palette and brushes, and set to work on that pretty little girl's red cloak.

"Do, Roy—do, my dear brother. Your loving friend, Polly.

"Be kind to Dad Fabian. Make much of the dear old man. Remember he is Polly's friend."

It was the morning after the receipt of this letter, so Richard informed Mildred, that Roy crept languidly from the sofa, where he spent most of his days, and sat for a long time fixedly regarding the unfinished canvas before him.

Richard made no observation, and shortly left the room. When he returned an hour afterwards, Roy was working at a child's drapery, with compressed lips and frowning brow.

He tossed back his fair hair with the old irritable movement as his brother smiled approval.

"Well done, Roy, there is nothing like making a beginning after all."

"I hate it as much as ever," was the sullen answer. "I am only doing it because—she told me—and I don't mean to disappoint her. I am her slave; she might put her pretty foot on my neck if she liked. Ah, Polly, Polly, what a poor fool you have made of me." And Roy put his head on the easel, and fairly groaned.

But there was no shirking labour after that. Roy spent long moody hours over his work, while Richard sat by with his books. An almost unbroken silence prevailed in the young artist's studio. "The sweet whistler" in Dr. Heriot's little glasshouse no longer existed, a half-stifled sigh, or an ejaculation of impatience, only reached Richard's ears from time to time; but Roy seemed to have

"IS THAT LETTER FOR ME, AUNT MILLY?" 45 no heart for conversation,—nothing interested him, his attention flagged after the first few minutes.

Richard was obliged to go back to Oxford at the beginning of the term; but Dad Fabian took his place. Mildred learnt to her dismay that the old man was located at the cottage, at Roy's own wish, and was likely to remain for some weeks. How Mildred's heart sank at the news; her plan had fallen to the ground; the change and quiet for which she was pining were indefinitely postponed.

No one but Dr. Heriot guessed how Mildred's strength was failing; but his well-meant inquiries were evidently so unpalatable that he forbore to press them. Only once or twice he hinted to Mr. Lambert that he thought his sister was looking less strong than usual, and wanted bracing and a change.

"Heriot tells me that you are not looking well, that you want a change, Mildred," her brother said to her one day, and, to his surprise, she looked annoyed, and answered more hastily than her wont—

"There is nothing the matter with me, at least nothing of consequence. I am not one of those who are always fancying themselves ill."

- "But you are thinner. Yes, I am sure he is right; you are thinner, Mildred."
- "What nonsense, Arnold; he has put that in your head. By and by I shall be glad of a little change, I dare say. When Mr. Fabian leaves Roy, I mean to take his place."
- "A good idea," responded Mr. Lambert, warmly; "it will be a treat for Rex, and will do you good at the same time. I was thinking of running up myself after Christmas. One sees so little of the boy, and his letters are so short and unsatisfactory; he seems a little dull, I fancy."
- "Mr. Fabian will cheer him up," replied Mildred, evasively. She was thankful when her brother went back to his study. She felt more than usually oppressed and languid to-day, though she would not own it to herself; her work wearied her, and the least effort to talk jarred the edge of her nerves.
- "How dreadful it is to feel so irritable and cross, as I have done lately," she thought. "Perhaps after all he is right, and I am not so strong as usual; but I cannot have them all fancying me ill. The bare idea is intolerable. If I am going to be ill, I hope I may know it, that I may get away somewhere, where his kindness will not kill me."

## "is that letter for me, aunt milly?" 47

She shivered here, partly from the thought, and partly from the opening of the door. A keen wind whistled through the passage, a rush of cold air followed Polly as she entered. Dr. Heriot was with her.

His cordial greeting was as hearty as ever.

"All alone, and in the dark, and positively doing nothing; how unlike Aunt Milly," he said, in his cheerful quizzical voice; and kneeling down on the rug, he stirred the fire, and threw on another log, rousing a flame that lighted up the old china and played on the ebony chairs and cabinet.

The shadows had all fled now, the firelight gleamed warmly on the couch, where Mildred was sitting in her blue dress, and on Dr. Heriot's dark face as he threw himself down in the easy-chair that, as he said, looked so inviting.

"Polly is tired, and so am I. We have been having an argument that lasted us all the way from Appleby." And he leant back his head on the cushions, and looked up lazily at Polly as she stood beside him in her soft furs, swinging her hat in her hand and gazing into the fire. "Polly, do be reasonable and sit down," he exclaimed, coaxingly.

"I cannot, I shall be late for tea; I-I-do not

wish to say anything more about it," she panted, somewhat unsteadily.

"Nay, Heartsease," he returned, gravely, "this is hardly using me well; let us refer the case to Aunt Milly. This naughty child," he continued, imprisoning her hand, as she still stood beside him—and Mildred noticed now that she seemed to lean against the chair for support—"this naughty Polly of ours is giving me trouble; she will have it she is too young to be married."

Mildred put her hand suddenly to her heart; a troublesome palpitation oppressed her breathing. Polly hung her head, and then a sudden resolution seized her.

"Let me go to Aunt Milly. I want to speak to her," she said, wrenching herself gently from his hold; and as he set her free, she dropped on the rug at Mildred's side.

"You must not come to me to help you, Polly," said Mildred, with a faint smile; "you must be guided in this by Dr. Heriot's wishes."

"Ah, I knew you would be on my side, Miss Lambert; but you have no idea how obstinate she is. She declares that nothing will induce her to marry until her nineteenth birthday."

"A whole year!" repeated Mildred, in surprise.

"IS THAT LETTER FOR ME, AUNT MILLY?" 49

She felt like a prisoner, to whom the bitterness of death was past, exposed to the torturing suspense of a long reprieve.

"Oh, Aunt Milly, ask him not to press me," pleaded the girl; "he is so good and patient in everything else, but he will not listen to me in this; he wants me to come home to him now, this Christmas."

"Why should we wait?" replied Dr. Heriot, with an unusual touch of bitterness in his voice. "I shall never grow younger; my home is solitary enough, Heaven knows; and in spite of all my kind friends here, I have to endure many lonely hours. Polly, if you loved me, I think you would hardly refuse."

"He says right," whispered Mildred, laying her cold hand on the girl's head. "It is your duty; he has need of you."

"I cannot," replied Polly, in a choked voice; but as she saw the cloud over her lover's brow, she came again to his side, and knelt down beside him.

"I did not mean to grieve you, dear; but you will wait, will you not?"

"For what reason, Polly?" in a sterner voice than she had ever heard from him before.

"For many reasons; because—because—" she vol. III. 42

hesitated, "I am young, and want to grow older and wiser for your sake; because—" and now a low sob interrupted her words, "though I love you dearly—ah, so dearly—I want to love you more, as I know I shall every day. You must not be angry with me if I try your patience a little."

"I am not angry," he repeated, slowly, "but your manner troubles me. Are you sure you do not repent our engagement — that you love me, Polly?"

"Yes, yes; please do not say such things," clinging to him, and crying as though her heart would break.

They had almost forgotten Mildred, shrinking back in the corner of her couch.

"Hush! Heartsease, my darling—hush! you distress me," soothing her with the utmost tenderness. "We will talk of this again; you shall not be hampered or vexed by me. I am not so selfish as that, Polly."

"No, you are goodness itself," she replied, remorsefully; and now she kissed his hand—oh, so gratefully. "But you must never say that again—never—never."

<sup>&</sup>quot;What?"

<sup>&</sup>quot;That I do not love you; it is not the truth;

"IS THAT LETTER FOR ME, AUNT MILLY?" 51 it cannot be, you know. You do not think it?" looking up fearfully into his face.

"I think you love me a little," he answered, lightly — too lightly, Mildred thought, for the gloomy look had not passed away from his eyes.

"He is disappointed; he thinks as I do, that perfect love ought to cast out fear," she said to herself.

But whatever were his thoughts, he did not give utterance to them, but only seemed bent on soothing Polly's agitation. When he had succeeded, he sent her away, to get rid of all traces of tears, as he said, but as the door closed on her, Mildred noticed a weary look crossed his face.

How her heart yearned to comfort him!

"Right or wrong, I suppose I must abide by her decision," he said at last, speaking more to himself than to her. That roused her.

"I do not think so," she returned, speaking with her old energy. "Give her a little time to get used to the idea, and then speak to her again. The thought of Christmas has startled her. Perhaps Easter would frighten her less."

"That is just it. Why should it frighten her?" he returned, doubtfully. "She has known me now for three years. I am no stranger to her; she has

always been fond of me; she has told me so over and over again. No," he continued, decidedly, "I will not press her to come till she wishes it. I am no boy that cannot bear a disappointment. I ought to be used to loneliness by this time."

"No, no; she shall not treat you so, Dr. Heriot. I will not have it. I—some one will prevent it; you shall not be left lonely for another year—you, so good and so unselfish." But here Mildred's excitement failed; a curious numb feeling crept over her; she fancied she saw a surprised look on Dr. Heriot's face, that he uttered an exclamation of concern, and then she knew no more.

## CHAPTER III.

## COOP KERNAN HOLE.

"The great and terrible Land
Of wilderness and drought
Lies in the shadows behind me—
For the Lord hath brought me out.

The great and terrible river
I stood that night to view
Lies in the shadows before me—
But the Lord will bear me through."

Poems by R. M.

MILDRED felt a little giddy and confused when she opened her eyes.

"Is anything the matter? I suppose I have been a little faint; but it is nothing," she said, feebly. Her head was on a soft pillow; her face was wet with cold, fragrant waters; Polly was hanging over her with a distressed expression; Dr. Heriot's hand was on her wrist.

\* Hush, you must not talk," he said, with a grave, professional air, "and you must drink this," so authoritatively that Mildred could not choose

but to obey. "It is nothing of consequence," he continued, noticing an anxious look on her face; "the room was hot, and our talk wearied you. I noticed you were very pale when we came in." And Mildred felt relieved, and asked no more questions.

She was very thankful for the kindness that shielded her from all questioning and comment. When Dr. Heriot had watched the reviving effects of the cordial, and had satisfied himself that there would be no return of the faintness, he quietly but peremptorily desired that Polly should leave her. "You would like to be perfectly alone for a little while, would you not?" he said, as he adjusted the rug over her feet and placed the screen between her and the firelight, and Mildred thanked him with a grateful glance. How could he guess that silence was what her exhausted nerves craved more than anything?

But Dr. Heriot had been not so impervious as he had seemed. He was aware that some nervous malady, caused by secret anxiety or hidden care, was wasting Mildred's fine constitution. The dilated pupils of the eyes, the repressed irritability of manner, the quick change of colour, with other signs of mental disturbance, had long ago attracted

his professional notice, and he had racked his brains to discover the cause.

"She has over-exerted herself or else she has some trouble," he said to himself that night, as he sat beside his solitary fire. She had crept away to her own room during the interval of peace that had been allowed her, and he had not suffered them to disturb her. "I will come and see her to-morrow," he had said to Olive, "let her be kept perfectly quiet until then;" and Olive, who knew from experience the soothing effects of his prescription, mounted guard herself over Mildred's room, and forbade Polly or Chriss to enter.

Dr. Heriot had plenty of food for meditation that night. In spite of his acquiescence in Polly's decision, he felt chilled and saddened by the girl's persistence.

For the first time he gravely asked himself, Had he made a mistake? Was she too young to understand his need of sympathy? Would it come to this, that after all she would disappoint him? As he looked round the empty room a strange bitterness came over him.

"And it is to this loneliness that she will doom me for another year," he said, and there was a heavy cloud on his brow as he said it. "If she really loved me, would she abandon me to another twelvementh of miserable retrospection, with only Margaret's dead face to haunt me with its strange beauty?" But even as the thought passed through him came the remembrance of those clinging arms and the dark eyes shining through their tears.

"I love you dearly—dearly—but I want to love you more."

"Oh, Heartsease," he groaned, "I fear that the mistake is mine, and that I have not yet won the whole of your innocent heart. I have taken it too much as a matter of course. Perhaps I have not wooed you so earnestly as I should have wooed an older woman, and yet I hardly think I have failed in either devotion or reverence. Ah," he continued, with an involuntary sigh, "what right have I to complain if she withhold her fresh young love—am I giving her all that is in me to give?" But here he stopped, as though the reflection pained him.

He remembered with what sympathy Mildred had advocated his cause. She had looked excited — almost indignant — as Polly had uttered her piteous protest for time. Had her clear eyes noticed any signs of vacillation or reluctance? Could he speak to her on the subject? Would

she answer him frankly? And then, for the first time, he felt as though he could not so speak to her.

"Every one take their troubles to her, but she shall not be harassed by me," he thought. "She is sinking now under the burthens which most likely other people have laid upon her. I will not add to their weight." And a strange pity and longing seized him to know what ailed the generous creature, who never thought of herself, but of others.

Mildred felt as though some ordeal awaited her when she woke the next morning. She looked so ill and weak that Olive was in despair when she insisted on rising and dressing herself. "It will bring on the faintness again to a certainty," she said, in a tone of unusual remonstrance; but Mildred was determined.

But she was glad of Olive's assistance before she had finished, and the toilet was made very slowly and wearily. At the drawing-room door Dr. Heriot met her with a reproachful face; he looked a little displeased.

"So you have cast my prescription to the wind," he said, drily, "and are determined not to own yourself ill." But Mildred coloured so painfully that he cut short his lecture and assisted her to the couch in silence.

"There you may stop for the next two or three days," he continued, somewhat grimly. "Mr. Lambert has desired me to look after you, and I shall take good care that you do not disobey my orders again. I have made Olive head nurse, and woe be to her if there be a single infringement of my rules."

Mildred looked up at him timidly. He had been so gentle with her the preceding evening that this change of manner disturbed her. This was not his usual professional gravity; on such occasions he had ever been kindness itself. He must be put out—annoyed—the idea was absurd, but could she have displeased him? She was too weak to bear the doubt.

"Have I vexed you, Dr. Heriot, by coming down?" she asked, gently. "I should be worse if I fancied myself ill. I—I have had these attacks before; they are nothing."

"That is your opinion, is it? I must say I thought better of your sense, Miss Lambert," still gruffly.

Mildred's eyes filled with tears.

"Yes, I am vexed," he continued, sitting down

by her; but his tone was more gentle now. "I am vexed that you are hiding from us that you are suffering. You keep us all in the dark; you deny you are ill. I think you are treating us all very badly."

"No-no," she returned, with difficulty. "I am not ill-you must not tell me so." And her cheek paled perceptibly.

"Have you turned coward suddenly?" he replied, with a keen look at her. "I have heard you say more than once that the dread of illness was unknown to you; that you could have walked a fever hospital without a shudder. What is become of your courage, Miss Lambert?"

"I am not afraid, but I do not want to be ill," she returned, faintly.

"That is more unlike you than ever. Impatience, want of submission, do not certainly belong to your category of faults. Well, if you promise to follow my prescription, I think I can undertake that you shall not be ill."

Mildred drew a long sigh of relief; the sigh of an oppressed heart was not lost on Dr. Heriot.

"But you must get rid of what is on your mind," he went on, quickly. "If other people's burthens lie heavily, you must shift them to their own shoulders and think only of yourself. Now I want to ask you a few questions."

Mildred looked frightened again, but something in Dr. Heriot's manner this morning constrained her to obey. His inquiries were put skilfully, and needed only a yea and nay, as though he feared she would elude him. Mildred found herself owning to loss of appetite and want of sleep; to languor and depression, and a tendency to excessive irritation; noises jarred on her; a latent excitement took the place of strength. She had lost all pleasure in her duties, though she still fulfilled them.

"And now what does this miserable state of the nerves mean?" was his next question. Mildred said nothing.

"You have suffered no shock — nothing has alarmed you?" She shook her head.

"You cannot eat or sleep; when you speak you change colour with every word; you are wasted, getting thinner every day, and yet there is no disease. This must mean something, Miss Lambert—excuse me; but I am your friend as well as your doctor. I cannot work in the dark."

Mildred's lips quivered. "I want change—rest. I have had anxieties—no one can be free in this

world. I am getting too weak for my work." What a confession from Mildred! At another time she would have died rather than utter it; but his quiet strength of will was making evasion impossible. She felt as though this friend of hers was reading her through and through. She must escape in some measure by throwing herself upon his mercy.

He looked uneasy at that; his eyes softened, then suffused.

"I thought as much," he muttered; "I could not be deceived by that face." And a great pity swelled up in his heart.

He would like to befriend this noble woman, who was always so ready to sacrifice herself to the needs of others. He would ask her to impart her trouble, whatever it was; he might be able to help her. But Mildred, who read his purpose in his eyes, went on breathlessly—

"It is the rest I want, and the change; I am not ill. I knew you would say so; but the nerves get strained sometimes, and then worries will come."

"Tell me your trouble," he returned abruptly, but it was the abruptness of deep feeling. "I have not forgotten your kindness to me on more than one occasion. I have debts of gratitic pay, and they are heavy. Make me your fri your brother, if you will; you will find I be trusted." But the poor soul only shrank him.

"It cannot be told—there are reasons a it. I have more than one trouble—anxiety, faltered. "Dr. Heriot, indeed — indeed, yo very good, but there are some things that obe told."

"As you will," he returned, very gently Mildred saw he was disappointed. In w strange complication she was involved! She not even speak to him of her fear on Roy's! He took his leave soon after that, and M fancied a slight reserve mingled with the kir with which he bade her good-bye.

· He seemed conscious of it, for he came again after putting on his coat, thereby pring a miserable afternoon of fanciful remoundable afternoon of fanciful remoundable afternoon of fanciful remoundable.

"I will think what is to be done about change," he said, drawing on his driving
"I am likely to be busy all day, and shall n you again this evening. Keep your mind as well as you can. You don't need to be t

what spirit all trials must be borne—the darker the cloud the more need of faith." He held out his hand to her again with one of his bright, genial smiles, and Mildred felt braced and comforted.

Mildred was obliged to allow herself to be treated as an invalid for the next few days; but when Dr. Heriot saw how the inaction and confinement fretted her, he withdrew a few of his restrictions, even at times going against his better judgment, when he saw how cruelly she chafed under her own restlessness.

This was the case one chill, sunless afternoon, when he found her standing by the window looking out over the fells, with a sad wistfulness that went to his heart.

As he went up to her he was shocked to see the marks of recent tears upon her face.

"What is this—you are not worse to-day?" he asked, in a tone of vexed remonstrance.

"No—oh, no," she returned, holding out her hand to him with a misty smile, the thin blue-veined hand, with its hot dry palm; "you will think me a poor creature, Dr. Heriot, but I could not help fretting over my want of strength just now."

"Rome was not built in a day," he responded,

cheerily; "and people who indulge in fainting fits cannot expect to feel like Hercules. Who would have thought that such an inexorable nurse as Miss Lambert should prove such a fractious invalid?" and there was a tone of reproof under the light raillery.

"I do not mean to be impatient," she answered, sighing; "but I am so weary of this room and my own thoughts, and then there are my poor people."

"Don't trouble your head about them; they will do very well without you," with pretended roughness.

She shook her head.

"You are wrong; they miss me dreadfully; Olive has brought me several messages from them already."

"Then Olive ought to be ashamed of herself, and shall be deposed from her office of nurse, and Polly shall reign in her stead."

But Mildred was too much depressed and in earnest to heed his banter.

"There is poor Rachel Sowerby up at Stenkrith; her mother has been down this morning to say that she cannot last very much longer."

"I am just going up to see her now. I fear it is only a question of days," he replied, gravely.

Mildred clasped her hands with an involuntary movement of pain.

- "Rachel is very dear to me; she is the model girl and the favourite of the whole school, and her mother says she is pining to see me. Oh, Dr. Heriot—" but here she stopped.
- "Well," he returned, encouragingly; and for the second time he noticed the exceeding beauty of Mildred's eyes, as she fixed them softly and beseechingly on his face.
- "Do you think it would hurt me to go that little distance, just to see Rachel?"
- "What, in this bitter wind!" he remonstrated. "Wait until to-morrow, and I will drive you over."
- "There may be no to-morrows for Rachel," she returned, with gentle persistence. "I am afraid I shall fret sadly if I do not see her again; she was my best Sunday scholar. The wind will not hur me; If you knew how I long to be out in it; just before you came in I was wishing I were on the top of one of those fells, feeling it sweep over me."
- "Ministers of grace defend me from the soft pleading of a woman's tongue," exclaimed Dr. Heriot, impatiently, but he laughed too; "you are a most troublesome patient, Miss Lambert; but I

suppose you must have your way; but you must take the consequences of your own wilfulness."

Mildred quietly seated herself.

"No, I am not wilful; I have no wish to disobey you," she returned, in a low voice.

He drew near and questioned her face; evidently it dissatisfied him.

"If I do not let you go, you will only worry yourself the whole day, and your lungs are sound enough," he continued, brusquely; but Mildred's strange unreasonableness tried him. "Wrap yourself up well. Polly is going with me, but there is plenty of room for both. I will pay my visit, and leave you with Rachel for an hour, while I get rid of some of my other patients."

Mildred lost no time in equipping herself, and though Dr. Heriot pretended to growl the greater part of the way, he could not help noticing how the wind—bleak and boisterous as it was—seemed to freshen his patient, and bring back the delicate colour to her cheeks.

"What a hardy north-country woman you have become," he said, as he lifted her down from the phaeton, and they went up the path to the house.

"I feel changed already; thank you for giving me my way in this," was the grateful answer. When Dr. Heriot had taken his departure, she went up to the sick room, and sat for a long time beside her old favourite, reading and praying with her, until Rachel had fallen into a doze.

"She will sleep maybe for an hour or two; she had a terrible night of pain," whispered Mrs. Sowerby, "and she will sleep all the sweeter for your reading to her. Poor thing! she was set on seeing her dear Miss Lambert, as she always calls you."

"I will come again and see her to-morrow, if Dr. Heriot permits it," she replied.

When Mrs. Sowerby had gone back to her daughter's room, she went and sat by herself at a window looking over Stenkrith; the rocks and white foaming pools were distinctly visible through the leafless trees; a steep flight of steps led down to the stream and waterfall; the steps were only a few yards from the Sowerbys' house. As Mildred looked, a strange longing to see the place again took possession of her.

For a moment she hesitated, as Dr. Heriot's strictures on her imprudence recurred to her memory, but she soon repelled them.

"He does not understand—how can he—that this confinement tries me," she thought, as she

crept softly down the stairs, so as not to disturb Rachel. "The wind was delicious. I feel ten times better than I did in that hot room; he will not mind when I tell him so."

Mildred's feverish restlessness, fed by bitter thought, was getting the better of her judgment; like the skeleton placed at Egyptian feasts to remind the revellers that they were mortal, so Mildred fancied her courage would be strengthened, her resolution confirmed, by a visit to the very spot where her bitterest wound had been received; she remembered how the dark churning waters had mingled audibly with her pain, and for the moment she had wished the rushing force had hurried her with it, with her sweet terrible secret undisturbed, to the bottom of that deep sunless pool.

And now the yearning to see it again was too strong to be resisted. Polly had accompanied Dr. Heriot. Mrs. Sowerby was in her daughter's room; there was no one to raise a warning voice against her imprudence.

The whole place looked deserted and desolate; the sun had hidden its face for days; a dark moisture clung to the stones, making them slippery in places; the wind was more boisterous than ever, wrapping Mildred's blue serge more closely round her feet, and entangling her in its folds, blowing her hair wildly about her face, and rendering it difficult with her feeble force to keep her footing on the slimy rocks.

"I shall feel it less when I get lower down," she panted, as she scrambled painfully from one rock to another, often stopping to take breath. A curious mood—gentle, yet reckless—was on her. "He would be angry with her," she thought. Ah, well! his anger would only be sweet to her; she would own her fault humbly, and then he would be constrained to forgive her; but this longing for freedom, for the strong winds of heaven, for the melody of rushing waters, was too intense to be resisted; the restlessness that devoured her still led her on.

"I see something moving down there," observed Polly, as Dr. Heriot's phaeton rolled rapidly over the bridge—"down by the steps, I mean; it looked almost like Aunt Mildred's blue serge dress."

"Your eyes must have deceived you, then," he returned coolly, as he pulled up again at the little gate.

Polly made no answer, but as she quickened her

steps towards the place, he followed her, half vexed at her persistence.

"My dear child, as though your Aunt Milly would do anything so absurd," he remonstrated. "Why, the rocks are quite unsafe after the rain, and the wind is enough to cut one in halves."

"It is Aunt Milly. I told you so," returned Polly, triumphantly, as she descended the step; "there is her blue serge and her beaver hat. Look! she sees us; she is waving her hand."

Dr. Heriot suppressed the exclamation that rose to his lips.

"Take care, Polly, the steps are slippery; you had better not venture on the stones," he said, peremptorily. "Keep where you are, and I will bring Miss Lambert back."

Mildred saw him coming; her heart palpitated a little.

"He will think me foolish, little better than a child," she said to herself; "he will not know why I came here;" and her courage evaporated. All at once she felt weak; the rocks were certainly terribly slippery.

"Wait for me; I will help you," he shouted, seeing her indecision; but either Mildred did not hear, or she misunderstood him; the stone was

too high for her unassisted efforts; she tried one lower; it was wet; her foot slipped, she tried to recover herself, fell, and then, to the unspeakable horror of the two watching her above, rolled from rock to rock and disappeared.

Polly's wild shriek of dismay rang through the place, but Dr. Heriot never lost his presence of mind for a moment.

"Stay where you are; on your peril disobey me," he cried, in a voice of thunder, to the affrighted girl; and then, though with difficulty, he steered his way through the slippery stones, and over the dangerous fissures. He could see her now; some merciful jag in the rocks had caught part of her dress, and arrested her headlong progress. The momentary obstacle had enabled her, as she slipped into one of the awful fissures that open into Coop Kernan Hole, to snatch with frantic hands at the slimy rock, her feet clinging desperately, to the narrow slippery ledge.

"John, save me!" she screamed, as she felt herself slipping into the black abyss beneath. "John!"

John Heriot heard her.

"Yes, I am coming, Mildred; hold on-hold on,

another minute." The drops of mortal agony stood on his brow as he saw her awful peril, but he dared not, for both their sakes, venture on reckless haste; already he had slipped more than once, but had recovered himself. It seemed minutes to both of them before Polly saw him kneeling on one knee beside the hole, his feet hanging over the water.

"Hush! do not struggle so, Mildred," he pleaded, as he got his arm with difficulty round her, and she clung to him almost frantically; the poor soul had become delirious from the shock, and thought she was being dashed to pieces; her face elongated and sharpened with terror, as she sank half fainting against his shoulder. The weight on his arm was terrible.

"Good Heavens! what can I do?" he ejaculated, as he felt his strength insufficient to lift her. His position was painful in the extreme; his knee was slipping under him; and the dripping serge dress, heavy with water, increased the strain on the left arm; a false movement, the slightest change of posture, and they must both have gone. He remembered how he had heard it said that Coop Kernan Hole was of unknown depth under the bridge; the dark sluggish pool lay black and terrible between the rocks; if she slipped from his

hold into that cruel water, he knew he could not save her, for he had ever been accounted a poor swimmer, and yet her dead-weight was already numbing his arm.

"Mildred, if you faint we must both die," he cried in despair.

His voice seemed to rouse her; some instinct of preservation prompted to renewed effort; and as he held her more firmly, she managed to get one hand round his neck—the other still clutched at the rock; and as Polly's cries for help reached a navvy working at some distance, she saw Dr. Heriot slowly and painfully lift Mildred over the edge of the rock.

"Thank God!" he panted, and then he could say no more; but as he felt the agonised shuddering run through Mildred's frame, as, unconscious of her safety, she still clung to him, he half-pityingly and half-caressingly put back the unbound hair from the pale face, as he would have done to a child.

But he looked almost as ghastly as Mildred did, when, aided by the navvy's strong arms, they lifted her over the huge masses of rocks and up the steep steps.

Polly ran to meet them; her lover's pale and

disordered appearance alarmed her almost as much as Mildred's did.

"Oh, Heriot," cried the young girl, "you are hurt; I am sure you are hurt."

"A strain, nothing else," he returned, quickly; "run on, dear Polly, and open the door for us. Mrs. Sowerby must take us in for a little while."

When Mildred perfectly recovered consciousness, she was lying on the old-fashioned couch in Mrs. Sowerby's best room; but she was utterly spent and broken, and could do nothing for a little while but weep hysterically.

Polly leant over her, raining tears on her hands.

"Oh, Aunt Milly," sobbed the faithful little creature, "what should we have done if we had lost you? Darling—darling, how dreadful it would have been."

"I wished to die," murmured Mildred, half to herself; "but I never knew how terrible death could be. Oh, how sinful—how ungrateful I have been." And she covered her face with her hands.

"Oh, Heriot; ask her not to cry so," pleaded poor Polly. "I have never seen her cry before, never—and it hurts me so."

"It will do her good," he returned, hastily; but

he went and stood by the window until Polly joined him.

"She is better now," she said, timidly glancing up into his absorbed face.

Upon that he turned round.

"Then we must get her home that she may change her wet things as soon as possible. Do you feel as though you can move?" he continued, in his ordinary manner, though perhaps it was a trifle grave. "You are terribly bruised, I fear, but I trust not otherwise injured."

She looked up a little surprised at the calmness of his tone, and then involuntarily she stretched out her hands to him—

"Let me thank you first—you have saved my life," she whispered.

"No," he returned, quietly. "It is true your disobedience placed us both in jeopardy; but it was your obedience at the last that really saved your life. If you had fainted, you must inevitably have been lost. I could not have supported you much longer in my cramped position."

"Your arm—did I hurt it?" she asked, anxiously, noticing an expression of pain pass over his face.

"I dare say I have strained it slightly," he answered, indifferently; "but it does not matter. The question is, do you think you can bear to be moved?"

"Oh, I can walk. I am better now," she replied, colouring slightly.

His coolness disappointed her; she was longing to thank him with the full fervour of a grateful heart. It was sweet, it was good in spite of everything to receive her life back through his hands. Never—never would she dare to repine again, or murmur at the lot Providence had appointed her; so much had the dark lesson of Coop Kernan Hole taught her.

"Well, what is it?" he asked, reading but too truly the varying expressions of her eloquent face.

"If you will only let me thank you," she faltered, "I shall never forget this hour to my dying day."

"Neither shall I," he returned, abruptly, as he wrapped her up in his dry plaid and assisted her to rise. His manner was as kind and considerate as ever during their short drive, but Mildred felt as though his reserve were imposing some barrier on her.

Consternation prevailed in the vicarage at the news of Mildred's danger. Olive, who seldom shed

tears, became pale and voiceless with emotion, while Mr. Lambert pressed his sister to his heart with a whispered thanksgiving that was audible to her alone.

It was good for Mildred's sore heart to feel how ardently she was beloved. A great flood of gratitude and contrition swept over her as she lay, bruised and shaken, with her hand in Arnold's, looking at the dear faces round her. "It has come to me not in the still, small voice, but in the storm," she thought. "He has brought me out of the deep waters to serve Him more faithfully—to give a truer account of the life restored to me."

The clear brightness of her eyes surprised Dr. Heriot as he came up to her to take leave; they reminded him of the Mildred of old. "You must promise to sleep to-night. Some one must be with you—Olive or Polly—you might get nervous alone," he said, with his usual thoughtfulness, but she shook her head.

"I think I am cured of my nervousness for ever," she returned, in a voice that was very sweet. The soft smiling eyes haunted him. Had an angel gone down and troubled the pool? What healing virtues had steeped the dark waters that her shuddering feet had pressed? Could faith full-

formed spring from such parentage of dead anguish and fear? Mildred could have answer in the verse she loved so well—

"He never smiled so sweet before
Save on the Sea of Sorrow, when the night
Was saddest on our heart. We followed Him
At other times in sunshine. Summer days
And moonlight nights He led us over paths
Bordered with pleasant flowers; but when His steps
Were on the mighty waters, when we went
With trembling hearts through nights of pain and loss,
His smile was sweeter, and His love more dear;
And only Heaven is better than to walk
With Christ at midnight over moonless seas."

## CHAPTER IV.

## DR. HERIOT'S MISTAKE.

"In the cruel fire of sorrow

Cast thy heart, do not faint or wail;

Let thy hand be firm and steady,

Do not let thy spirit quail:

But wait till the trial is over,

And take thy heart again;

For as gold is tried by fire,

So a heart must be tried by pain!"

Adelaide Anne Procter.

DRED slept soundly that night in spite of her ies. It was Dr. Heriot who waked. hat nightmare of oppression was on him? It light, scorching and illuminating, was shining im through the gloom? Was he losing his implied that he dreamt it? Had he really heard "John, save me, John!" as of a woman in all anguish calling on her mate, as Margaret once—but once—called him, when a glimpse he dark valley had been vouchsafed her, and had bidden him, with frenzied eye and tongue, ther downward course: "I cannot die—at least,

not like this—you must save me, John!" and that time he had saved her.

And now he had heard it again, at the only time when conventionality lays aside its decorous disguise, and the souls of men are bare to their fellows—at the time of awful peril on the brink of a momentarily expected death: so had she called to him, and so, with the sudden waking response of his soul, he had answered her.

He could see it all now. Never, to his dying hour, could he forget that scene—the prostrate figure crashing among the rocks, as though to an immediate and terrible death; the agonised struggle in the dark pit, the white face pressed heavily like death to his shoulder, the long unbound hair streaming across his arm; never before had he owned to himself that this woman was fair, until he had put back the blinding hair with his hand, as she clung to him in suffering helplessness.

"I wished to die, but I never knew how terrible death could be," he had heard her whisper between her quivering lips; and the knowledge that her secret was his had bidden him turn away his eyes from her—his own suffused with tears.

"Fool! blind fool that I was!" he groaned.
"Fool! never to guess how dear she was until I

saw death trying to snatch her from me; never to know the reason why her presence inspired me with such comfort and such rest! And I must needs call it friendship. Was it friendship that brought me day after day with such a sore heart to minister to her weakness?—was it only friendship and pity, and a generous wish to succour her distress?"

"Oh, fool! miserable fool! for ever fated to destroy my own peace of mind!" But we need not follow the bitter self-communing of that generous spirit through that long night of doubt and pain from which he rose a sadder and a better mar.

Alas! he had grasped the truth too late. The true woman, the true mate, the very nature akin to his own, had been beside him all these years, and he had not recognised her, blind in his pitiful worship of lesser lights.

And as he thought of the innocent girl who had pledged her faith to him, he groaned again within himself. Polly was not less dear to him in the misery that had befallen him, yet he knew, and shuddered at the knowledge, that all unwittingly he had deceived himself and her; he would love his child-wife dearly, he knew, but not as he could love a woman like Mildred,

"If she had been less reserved, less unapproachable in her gentle dignity, it might have been better for both of us," he said to himself. "The saint has hidden the woman; one cannot embrace a halo!" and he thought with sharp anguish how well this new phase of weakness had become her. When she had claimed his indulgence for her wayward and nervous fancies, he had felt even then a sort of pride that she should appeal to him in her helplessness.

But these were vain thoughts. It might have been better for both of them if she were lying now under the dark waters of Coop Kernan Hole, her angel soul in its native heaven. Yet it might be far better; he did not know—he had not Mildred's faith; for as long as they must dwell together, and yet apart, in this mortal world, life could only be a bitter thing for him; but not for that should he cease to struggle.

"I have more than myself to consider," he continued, as he rose and drew back the curtain, and looked out on the rich harvest of the sky-glittering sheaves of stars, countless worlds beyond worlds, stretching out into immensity. "God do so to me and more also if my unkindness or fickleness cloud the clear mirror of that girlish soul. It is

better, far better, for me to suffer—ay, for her too—than to throw off a responsibility at once so sacred and so pure."

How Mildred would have gloried in this generous victory if she had witnessed it! The knowledge that the tardy blessing of his love had been vouch-safed her, though too late and in vain, would have gladdened her desolate heart, and the honour and glory of it would have decked her lonely life with infinite blossom.

But now she could only worship his goodness None but Mildred had ever rightly from afar. read him, or knew the unselfishness that was so deeply engrained in this man's nature. and impulsive by nature, he had patiently wooed and faithfully held to the woman who had scorned his affection and provoked his forbearance; he had borne his wrecked happiness, the daily spectacle of his degradation, with a resignation that was almost sublime; he had comforted the poor sinner on her death-bed with assurances of forgiveness that had sunk into her soul with strange healing, when at last she had left him; he had buried his dead out of his sight, covering with thick sods, and heaping the earth with pious hands over the memory of her past sins.

It was this unselfishness that had first taught him to feel tenderly to the poor orphan; he had schemed out of pure benevolence to make her his wife, until the generous fancy had grown dear to him, and he had believed his own happiness involved in it.

And now that it had resulted in a bitter awakening to himself and disappointment to another, no possibility of eluding his fate ever came into his Polly already belonged to him; she was mind. his, made his own by a distinct and plighted troth; he could no more put her away from him than he would have turned away the half-frozen robin that sought refuge from the inclement storm. Mildred had betrayed her love too late; it was his lot to rescue her from death, but not to bid her welcome to a heart that should in all honour belong True, it was a trial most strange and to another. bitter—an ordeal from which flesh and blood might well shrink; but long before this he had looked into the burning flery furnace of affliction, and he knew, as such men know, that though he might be cast therein bound and helpless, that even there the true heart could discern the form most like unto the Son of God.

It was with some such feeling as this that

he lingered by Polly's side, as though to gain a minute's strength before he should be ushered into Mildred's presence.

"How tired you look, Heriot," she said, as he stood beside her; the word had involuntarily slipped from her in her gladness yesterday, and as she timidly used it again his lips touched her brow in token of his thanks.

"We are improving, Heartsease. I suppose you begin to find out that I am not as formidable as I look—that Dr. Heriot had a very chilling sound, it made me feel fifty at least."

"I think you are getting younger, or I am getting older," observed Polly, quaintly; "to be sure you look very pale this morning, and your forehead is dreadfully wrinkled. I am afraid your arm has been troubling you."

"Well, it has been pretty bad," he returned, evasively; "one does not get over a strain so easily. But, now, how is Mildred?"

The word escaped from him involuntarily, but he did not recall it. Polly did not notice his slight confusion.

"She is down in the drawing-room. I think she expects you," she replied. "Olive said she had a beautiful night, but of course the bruises are very

painful; one of her arms is quite blackened, she cannot bear it touched."

"I will see what can be done," was his answer.

As he crossed the lobby his step was as firm as ever, his manner as gravely kind as he stood by Mildred's side; the delicacy of her aspect smote him with dull pain, but she smiled in her old way as she gave him her left hand.

"The other is so much bruised that I cannot bear the lightest touch," she said, drawing it out from her white shawl, and showing him the cruel black marks; "it is just like that to my shoulder."

He looked at it pityingly.

"And yet you slept?"

"As I have not slept for weeks; no terrible dreams haunted me, no grim presentiments of evil fanned my pillow with black wing; you must have exorcised the demon."

"That is well," he returned, sitting down beside her, and trying to speak with his old cheerfulness; "reality has beaten off hypochondriacal fancies. Coop Kernan Hole has proved a stern mentor."

"I trust I may never forget the lesson it has taught me," she returned, with a slight shudder at the remembrance, and then they were both silent for a moment. "Dr. Heriot," she continued,

presently, "yesterday I wanted to thank you—I ought rather to have craved your forgiveness."

He smiled at that; in spite of himself the old feeling of rest had returned to him with her presence; her sweet looks, her patience, her brave endurance of what he knew would be keen suffering to other women, won the secret tribute of his admiration; he would lay aside his heavy burthen for this one hour, and enjoy this brief interval of peace.

"I do not wonder that you refused my thanks," she went on, earnestly; "to think that my foolish act of disobedience should have placed your life as well as mine in such deadly peril; indeed, you must assure me of your forgiveness, or I shall never be happy again," and Mildred's lip trembled.

He took the bruised hand in his, but so tenderly that she did not wince at his touch; the blackened fingers lay on his palm as restfully as the little bird he had once warmed in his hands one snowy day. How he loved this woman who was suing to him with such sweet lips for forgiveness;—the latent flame just kindled burned with an intensity that surprised himself.

"Ah!" she said, mistaking his silence, and looking up into his dark face—and it looked

strangely worn and harassed in the clear morning light—" you do not answer, you think I am much to blame. I have tried your patience too fareven yours!"

"I was angry with you, certainly, when I saw you down on those rocks jeopardising your precious life," he replied, slowly. "Such foolhardiness was unlike you, and I had reserved certain vials of wrath at my disposal—but now——"

- · He finished with his luminous smile.
  - "You think I have been punished sufficiently?"
- "Yes, first stoned and then half submerged. I forgave you directly you called on me for help," he returned, making believe to jest, but watching her intently all the time. Would she understand his vague allusion? But Mildred, unconscious that she had betrayed herself, only looked relieved.

"Besides, there can be no question of forgiveness between friends, and whatever happens we are friends always," relinquishing her hand a little abruptly.

He rose soon after that.

Mildred was uneasy; he was evidently suffering severely from his arm, but he continued to evade her anxious inquiries, assuring her that it was nothing to the pain of her bruises, and that a wakeful night, more or less, mattered little to him.

But as he went out of the room, he told himself that these interviews were perilously sweet, and must be avoided at all hazards; either he must wound her with his coldness, or his tenderness would inevitably betray itself in some unguarded look or word. Twice, already, had her name lingered on his tongue, and more than one awkward pause had brought her clear glances questioning to his face.

What right had he to hold the poor blackened hand in his for more than a moment? But the sweet soul had taken it all so naturally; her colour had never varied; possibly her great deliverance had swallowed all lesser feelings for the time; the man she loved had become her preserver, and this knowledge was so precious to her, that it had lifted her out of her deep despondency.

But as he set forth to his work, he owned within himself that such things must not be, it were a stain on his integrity to suffer it; from the first of Mildred's coming their intercourse had been free and unrestrained, but for the future he would time his visits when the other members of the family would be present, or, better still, he would keep Polly by his side, trusting that the presence of his young betrothed would give him the strength he needed.

Mildred did not seem to notice the change, it was effected so skilfully; she was always better pleased when Olive or Polly was there, it diverted Dr. Heriot's attention from herself, and caused her less embarrassment; her battered frame was in sore need of rest, but with her usual unselfishness, she resumed some of her old duties as soon as possible, that Olive might not feel over-burthened.

"It seems as though I have been idle for such a long time," she said, in answer to Dr. Heriot's deprecating glance at the mending beside her; "Olive has no time now, and these things are more troublesome to her than to most people. Tomorrow I mean to take to housekeeping again, for Polly feels herself quite unable to manage Nan."

Dr. Heriot shook his head, but he did not directly forbid the experiment. He knew that to a person of Mildred's active habits, anything approaching to indolence was a positive crime; it was better for them both that she should assert that she was well, and that he should be free to relax his vigilance; he could still watch over her, and interfere when it became necessary to do so.

Mildred had reason to be thankful that he did not oppose her exertions, for before long fresh work came to her.

The very morning after Dr. Heriot had withdrawn his silent protest, a letter in a strange handwriting was laid beside Mildred's breakfast-plate; the postmark was London, and she opened it in some little surprise; but Polly, who was watching her, noticed that she turned pale over the contents.

- "Is it about Roy?" she whispered; and Mildred started.
- "Yes, he has been ill," and she looked at her brother doubtfully; but he stretched out his hand for the letter, and read it in silence.

Polly watched them anxiously.

- "He is not very ill, Aunt Milly?"
- "Not now; but I greatly fear he has been so. Mrs. Madison writes that it was a neglected cold, with a sharp attack of inflammation, but that the inflammation has subsided; he is terribly weak, and needs nursing, and the doctor insists that his friends should be informed."
  - "But Dad Fabian is with him?"
- "No, he is quite alone. The strangest part is that he would not suffer her to write to us. I suppose he dreaded our alarm."

"It was wrong—very wrong," groaned Mr. Lambert; "his brother not with him, and he all that distance from us; Mildred, my dear, you must go to him without delay."

Mildred smiled faintly; she thought her strength was small for such a long journey, but she did not say so. Anxiety for his son had driven the remembrance of her accident from his mind; a slight attack of rheumatic gout, to which he had been subject of late years, prevented him from undertaking the journey as he wished.

"You will go, my dear, will you not?" he pleaded, anxiously.

"If Aunt Milly goes, I must go to take care of her," broke in Polly.

Her face was pale, her eyes dilated with excitement. Olive looked on wistfully, but said nothing; it was never her way to thrust herself forward on any occasion, and however much she wished to help Mildred in nursing Roy, she did not drop a hint to the effect; but Mildred was not slow to interpret the wistfulness.

"It is Olive's place to nurse her brother," she said, with a trace of reproof in her voice; but though Polly grew crimson she still persisted.

"I did not mean that-you know I did not,

Aunt Milly!" a little indignantly. "I only thought I could wait on you, and save you trouble, and then when he was better I could——" but her lip quivered, and when the others looked up, expecting her to finish her sentence, she suddenly and most unexpectedly burst into tears, and left the room.

Olive followed Mildred when she rose from the breakfast-table.

"Aunt Milly, do let her go. Poor Polly! she looks so miserable."

"It is not to be thought of for a moment," returned Mildred, with unusual decision; "if no one but Polly can accompany me, I shall go alone."

"But Polly is so fond of Roy," pleaded Olive; timidly regarding herself, she could persist with more boldness on another's behalf. "Roy would not care for me half so much as he would for her; when he had that feverish cold last year, no one seemed to please him but Polly. Do let her go, Aunt Milly," continued the generous-hearted girl. "I do not mind being left. If Roy is worse I could come to you," and Olive spoke with the curious choke in her voice that showed strong emotion.

Mildred looked touched, but she remained firm. Little did Olive guess her reasons.

"I could not allow it for one moment, Olive. I think," hesitating a little, as though sure of inflicting pain, "that I ought to goal one, unless Roy is very ill. I do not see how your father is to be left, he might have another attack, and Richard is not here."

"I forgot papa," in a conscience-stricken tone.
"I am always forgetting something."

"Yes, and yourself in the bargain," smiling at her earnest self-depreciation.

"No, please don't laugh, Aunt Milly, it was dreadfully careless of me—what should we all do without you to remind us of things? Of course papa must be my first thought, unless—unless dear Rex is very ill," and a flush of pain passed over Olive's sallow face.

Mildred melted over this fresh instance of Olive's unselfish goodness; she wrapped her arms fondly round the girl.

"Dear Olive, this is so good of you!"

"No, it is only my duty," but the tears started to her eyes.

"If I did not think it were, I would not have proposed it," she returned, reluctantly; "but you

now how little care your father takes of himself, and then he will fret so about Roy when Richard s away. I never like to leave him."

"Do not say any more, Aunt Milly; nothing but eal positive danger to Roy would induce me to eave him."

"No, I knew I could trust you," drawing a relieved breath; "but, indeed, I have no such fear for Rex. Mrs. Madison says it was only a slight attack of inflammation, and that it has quite subsided. He will be dreadfully weak of course, and that is why the doctor has sent for us; he will want weeks of nursing."

"And you will not take Polly or Chriss. Remember how far from strong you are, and Rex is so exacting when he is ill."

"Chriss would be no use to me, and Polly's place is here," was Mildred's quiet answer as she went on with her preparations for the next day's journey; but she little knew of the tenacity with which Polly clave to her purpose.

When Dr. Heriot came in that afternoon for his last professional chat with Mildred, he found her looking open-eyed and anxious in the midst of business, reading out a list for Olive, who was writing patiently from her dictation; Polly was

crouched up by the fire doing nothing; she had not spoken to any one since the morning; she hardly raised her head when he came in.

Mildred explained the reason of their unusual bustle in her clear, succinct way. Roy was ill, how ill she could not say. Mr. Lambert had had a touch of gout last night, and dared not run the risk of a journey just now. Olive must stop with her father, at least for the present, and as Chriss was too young to be of the least possible use she was going alone. Polly's name was not mentioned. Dr. Heriot looked blank at the tidings.

"Alone, and in your state of health! why, where is Polly? she is a capital nurse; she is worth a score of others; she will keep up your spirits, save you fatigue, and cheer up Roy in his convalescence."

"You cannot spare her; Polly's place is here," replied Mildred, nervously; but to her surprise Polly interrupted her.

"That is not the reason, Aunt Milly."

"My dear Polly!" exclaimed Dr. Heriot, amazed at the contradiction.

"No, it is not, and she knows it," returned the girl, excitedly; "ask her, Heriot; look at her;

that is not the reason she will not suffer me to go to Roy."

Mildred turned her burning face bravely on the two.

"Whatever reasons I have, Polly knows me well enough to respect them," she said, with dignity; "it is far better for Roy that his aunt or his sister should be with him. Polly ought to know that her place is beside you."

"Aunt Milly, how dare you speak so," cried the girl, hotly, "as though Roy were not my own—own brother. Have we not cared for each other ever since I came here a lonely stranger; do you think he will get better if he is fretting, and knows why you have left me behind; when he was ill in the summer, would he have any one to wait on him but me?"

"Oh, Polly," began Mildred, sorrowfully, for the girl's petulance and obstinacy were new to her; but Dr. Heriot stopped her.

"Let the child speak," he said, quietly; "she has never been perverse to you before; she has something on her mind, or she would not talk so."

The kind voice, the unexpected sympathy, touched Polly's sore heart; and as he held out

his hand to her, she crept out of her dark corner. He drew her gently to his side.

"Now, Polly, what is it? there is something here that I do not understand—out with it like a brave lassie."

But she hung her head.

"Not now, not here, before the others," she whispered, and with that he rose from his seat, but he still kept hold of her hand.

"Polly is going to make a clean breast of it; I am to hear her confession," he said, with a cheerfulness that reassured Mildred. "There is no time like the present. I mean to bring her back by and by, and then we will make our apologies together."

Mildred sighed as the door closed after them; she would fain have known what passed between them; her heart grew heavy with foreboding as time elapsed and they did not make their appearance. When her business was finished, and Olive had left her, she sat for more than half an hour with her eyes fixed on the door, feeling as though she could bear the suspense no longer.

She started painfully when the valves unclosed.

"We have been longer than I expected," began Dr. Heriot.

His face was grave, and Mildred fancied his eyes looked troubled. Polly had been crying.

"It was a rambling confession, and one difficult to understand," he continued, keeping the girl near him, and Mildred noticed she leant her face caressingly against his coat-sleeve, as she stood there; "and it goes back to the day of our picnic at Hill-beck."

Mildred moved uneasily; there was something reproachful in his glance directed towards herself; she dropt her eyes, and he went on—

"It seems you were all agreed in keeping me in the dark; you had your reasons, of course, but it appears to me as though I ought to have been the first to hear of Roy's visit," and there was a marked emphasis in his words that made Mildred still more uncomfortable. "I do not wish to blame you, you acted for the best, of course, and I own the case a difficult one; it is only a pity that my little girl should have considered it her duty to keep anything from me."

"I told him it was Roy's secret, not mine," murmured Polly, and he placed his hand kindly on her head.

"I do not see how she could have acted otherwise," returned Mildred, rather indistinctly.

"No, I am more inclined to blame her advisers than herself," was the somewhat cool response; "mysteries are bad things between engaged people. Polly kept a copy of her letter to show me, but she never found courage to do so until to-night, and yet she is quite aware what are Roy's feelings towards her."

Mildred's voice had a sound of dismay in it— "Oh, Polly! then you have deceived me too."

"You have no reason to say so," returned the girl, proudly, but her heart swelled over her words; "it was that—that letter, and your silence, that told me, Aunt Milly; but I could not—it was not possible to say it either to you or to Dr. Heriot."

"You see it was hard for her, poor child," was his indulgent comment; "but you might have helped her; you might have told me yourself, Miss Lambert."

But Mildred repelled the accusation firmly.

"It was no business of yours, Dr. Heriot, or Polly's either, that Roy loved her. Richard and I were right to guard it; it was his own secret, his own trouble. Polly would never have known but for her own wilfulness."

"Yes I should, Aunt Milly; I should have found it out from his silence," returned Polly, with

downcast eyes. "I could not forget his changed looks, they troubled me more than you know. I puzzled myself over them till I was dizzy. I felt heartbroken when I found it out, but I could not have told Heriot."

"It would have been better for us both if you had," he replied, calmly; but he uttered no further reproach, only there was a keen troubled look in his eyes, as he gazed at the girl's upturned face, as though he suddenly dreaded the loss of something dear to him.

- "Heartsease, it would have been better for you and me."
- "Heriot, what do you mean?" she whispered, vehemently; "surely you did not misunderstand me; you could not doubt the sincerity of my words, my love?"
- "Neither the one nor the other," was the quiet reply; "do I not know my Polly? could I not trust that guileless integrity as I would my own? You need not fear my misunderstanding you; I know you but too well."
- "Are you sure that you do?" clinging to him more closely.
- "Am I sure that I am alive? No, Polly, I do not doubt you; when you tell me that you love Roy

as though he were your own brother, that you are only sorry for him, and long to comfort him, I believe you. I am as sure that you speak the truth as you know it."

"And you will trust me?" stroking the coatsleeve as she spoke.

"Have I not told you so?" reproachfully; "am I a tyrant to keep you in durance vile, when your adopted brother lies dangerously ill, and you assure me of your power to minister to him? Miss Lambert, it is by my own wish that Polly goes with you to London; she thinks Roy will not get well unless he sees her again."

Mildred started. Polly had kept her thoughts so much to herself lately that she had not understood how much was passing in her mind; did she really believe that her influence was so great over Roy, that her persuasion would recall him from the brink of the grave? Could Dr. Heriot credit such a supposition; was not the risk a daring one? He could not be so sure of himself and her; but looking up, as these thoughts passed through her mind, she encountered such a singular glance from Dr. Heriot that her colour involuntarily rose; it told her he understood her scruples, but that his

motives were fixed, inscrutable; it forbade questioning, and urged compliance with his wishes, and after that there was nothing more to be said.

But in the course of the evening Polly volunteered still further information—

"You know he is going with us himself," she said, as she followed Mildred into her room to assist in the packing.

Mildred very nearly dropt the armful of things she was carrying, a pile of Roy's shirts she had been mending; she faced round on Polly with unusual energy—

"Who is going with us? Not Dr. Heriot?"

"Yes; did he not tell you so? I heard him speaking to Mr. Lambert and saying that you were not fit to undertake such a long journey by yourself; he did not count me, as he knew I should lose my head in the bustle; very rude of him, was it not? and then he told Mr. Lambert that he should see Roy and bring him back a report. Oh, I am so glad he is coming," speaking more to herself than Mildred; "how good, how good he is."

Mildred did not answer; but after supper that

night, when Dr. Heriot had again joined them, she asked if he had really made up his mind to accompany them.

"You did not tell me of your intention," she said, a little nettled at his reserve with her.

"No; I was afraid of your raising objections and heaping all sorts of useless lumber on me; regret that I should take so much trouble, and so forth," trying to turn it off with a jest.

"Are you going on Roy's account?" abruptly.

"Well, not wholly. Of course his medical man's report will be sufficient; but all the same it will be a relief to his father's mind."

"I suppose you are afraid to trust Polly with methen? but indeed I will take care of her; there is no need for you to undergo such a fatiguing journey," went on Mildred, pretending to misunderstand him, but anxious if possible to turn him from his purpose.

But Dr. Heriot's cool amused survey baffled he

"A man has a right to his own reasons, suppose? Perhaps I think one of my patients hardly able to look after herself just yet."

"Oh, Dr. Heriot!" hardly able to believe ithough from his own lips; "this is so like you—

so like your usual thoughtfulness; but indeed it is not necessary; Polly will take care of me."

"I dare say she will," with a glint of humour in his eyes; "but all the same you must put up with my company."

## CHAPTER V.

## THE COTTAGE AT FROGNAL.

"Whose soft voice
Should be the sweetest music to his ear."

Bethune.

THE journey was accomplished with less difficulty and fatigue than Mildred had dared to expect.

Dr. Heriot's attentions were undemonstrative but unceasing. For a greater part of the way Mildred lay back amongst her snug wrappings, talking little, but enjoying to the full the novelty of being the object of so much care and thought. "He is kind to everybody, and now he has taken all this trouble for me," she said to herself; "it is so like him—so like his goodness."

They were a very quiet party. Dr. Heriot was unusually silent, and Polly sat watching the scenery and flying mile-stones with half-dreamy absorption. When darkness came on, she nestled down by Mildred's side. From his corner of the carriage, Dr. Heriot secretly peered at the faces

before him, under the guttering oil-lamp. Mildred's eyes had closed at last from weariness; her thin cheek was pressed on the dark cushion. In spite of the worn lines, the outline of the face struck him as strangely fair; a fine nature was written there in indelible characters; even in the abandonment of utter weariness, the mouth had not relaxed its firm sweet curve; a chastened will had gradually smoothed the furrows from the brow; it was as smooth and open as a sleeping child, and yet youth had no part there; its tints and roundness had long ago fled.

How had it been that Polly's piquant charms had blinded him? As he looked at her now, half-lovingly, half-sadly, he owned that she could not be otherwise than pretty in his eyes, and yet the illusion was dispelled; but even as the thought passed through his mind, Polly's dark eyes unclosed.

"Are we near London? oh, how tired I am!" she said, with a weary, petulant sigh. "I cannot sleep like Aunt Milly; and the darkness and the winging make me giddy. One can only see great blanks of mist and rushing walls, and red eyes blinking everywhere."

Dr. Heriot smiled over the girl's discontent.

"You will see the lights of the station in another ten minutes. Poor little Heartsease. You are tired and cold and anxious, and we have still a long drive before us."

"It has not been so long after all," observed Mildred, cheerfully. She did not feel cold or particularly tired; pleasant dreams had come to her; some thoughtful hand had drawn the furlined rug round her as she slept. As they jolted out of the light station and into the dark Euston Road beyond, she sat thoughtful and silent, reviewing the work that lay before her.

It was late in the evening when the travellers reached the little cottage at Frognal. Roy had taken a fancy to the place, and had migrated thither the previous summer, in company with a young artist named Dugald.

It was a low, old-fashioned house, somewhat shabby-looking by daylight, but standing back from the road, with a pleasant strip of garden lying round it, and an invisible walk formed of stunted, prickly shrubs, which had led its owner to give it the name of "The Hollies."

Roy had fallen in love with the straggling lawn and mulberry trees, and beds of old-fashioned flowers. He declared the peonies, hollyhocks, and lupins, and small violet-and-yellow pansies reminded him of Castlesteads Vicarage; for it was well known that Mr. Delaware clave with fondness to the flowers of his childhood, and was much given to cultivate all manner of herbs, to be used medicinally by the poor of the neighbourhood.

A certain long, low room, with an out-of-theway window, was declared to have the north light, and to be just the thing for a studio, and was shared conjointly by the young artists, who also took their frugal meals together, and smoked their pipes in a dilapidated arbour overlooking the mulberry-tree.

Mildred knew that Herbert Dugald was at the present moment in Mentone, called thither by the alarming illness of his father, and that his room had been placed at Roy's disposal. The cottage was a large one, and she thought there would be little difficulty in accommodating Polly and herself; and as Mrs. Madison had no other lodgers, they could count on a tolerable amount of quiet and comfort; and in spite of the quaintness and homeliness of the arrangements, they found this to be the case.

Dr. Heriot had telegraphed their probable arrival, so they were not unexpected. Mrs. Madison,

an artist's widow herself, welcomed them with unfeigned delight; her pleasant, sensible Scotch face broadened with smiles as she came forward to meet them.

"Eh, he's better, poor lad, though I never thought to say it," she said, answering Mildred's anxious look. "He would not let me write, as I wished, for fear of alarming his father, he said; but as soon as the letter was posted, he made me telegraph for his brother; he arrived last evening."

"Richard!" ejaculated Mildred, feeling things were worse than even she had expected; but at that moment Richard appeared, gently closing the door behind him.

"Hush! he knows you are here;—you, I mean, Aunt Milly," perceiving Polly now, with some surprise; "but we must be very careful. Last night I thought we should have lost him. Ah, Dr. John, how good of you to bring them! Come in—here; we expected you, you see, Aunt Milly," and—he led them into poor Roy's sitting-room.

There was a blazing fire in the studio; the whitchina tiles reflected a pleasant glow and heat; the heavy draperies that veiled the cross-lights looked snug and dark; tea was on the little round table; a large old-fashioned couch stood inviting near.

ichard took off Mildred's bonnet and hung it on n empty easel; Polly's furs found a place on a onderfully carved oak chest.

There was all the usual lumber belonging to a udio. Richard, in an interval of leisure, had deed cleared away a heterogeneous rubbish of pes, boxing-gloves, and foils, but the upper part the room was a perfect chaos of portfolios, books, and musical instruments, the little square piano terally groaned under the dusty records; still here was a wide space of comfort round the tiled re-place, where all manner of nursery tales leaped atto existence under the kindling flame with just mough confusion to be quaint and picturesque.

Neither Mildred nor Polly found fault with the it of armour and the carved chair, that was good everything but to sit upon; the plaster busts ham bronzes struck them as beautiful; the red velvet curtain had an imposing effect, as as the shreds and scraps of colour introduced where. Roy's velvet coat and gold-tasselled king-cap lay side by side with an old Venetian ment, stiff with embroidery and dirt. Polly ched it caressingly as she passed.

Mildred's eyes had noted all these surroundings lile she sat down on the couch where Roy had

tossed for so many, many days, and let Richard wait on her; but her anxious looks still mutely questioned him.

"You shall go in and see him directly you are rested and have had some tea," said Richard, busily occupying himself with the little black kettle. "He heard your ring, and made a sign to me to come to you; he has been wishing for you all night, poor fellow; but it was his own fault, telegraphing to me instead."

"You look fagged, Cardie; and no wonder—it must have been dreadful for you alone."

"Mrs. Madison was with me. I would not have been without her; she is a capital nurse, whatever Rex may say. At one time I got alarmed; the pain in the side increased, and the distressed breathing was painful to hear, the pulse reaching to a great height. I fancied once or twice that he was a little light-headed."

"Very probably," returned Dr. Heriot, gravely—placing himself quietly between Mildred and the—fire, as she shielded her face from the flame. "I cannot understand how such a state of things should be. I always thought Roy's a tolerably sound constitution; nothing ever seemed to give him cold."

"He has never been right since he was laid up with his foot," replied Richard, with a slight hesitation in his manner. "He did foolish things, Mrs. Madison told me: took long walks after painting-hours in the fog and rain, and on more than one occasion forgot to change his wet things. She noticed he had a cold and cough, and tried once or twice to dissuade him from venturing out in the damp, but he only laughed at her precautions. I am afraid he has been very reckless," finished Richard, with a sigh, which Dr. Heriot echoed. Alas! he understood too well the cause of Roy's recklessness.

Polly had been shrinking into a corner all this time, her cheeks paling with every word; but now Dr. Heriot, without apparently noticing her agitation, placed her in a great arm-chair beside the table, and insisted that she should make tea for them all.

"We have reason to be thankful that the inflammation has subsided," he said, gravely. "From what Richard tells us he has certainly run a great risk, but I must see him and judge for myself." And as Richard looked doubtfully at Mildred, he continued, decidedly, "You need not fear that my presence will harass or excite him, if he be as ill as

46

you describe. I will take the responsibility of the act on myself."

"It will be a great relief to my mind, I confess," replied Richard, in a low voice. "I like Dr. Blenkinsop, but still a second opinion would be a great satisfaction to all of us; and then, you know him so well."

"Are you sure it will not be a risk?" whispered Polly, as he stood beside her. She slid a hot little hand into his as she spoke, "Heriot, are you sure it will be wise?"

"Trust me," was his sole reply; but the looks that accompanied it might well reassure her, it was so full of pity for her and Roy; it seemed to say that he so perfectly understood her, that as far as in him lay he would take care of them both.

Poor Polly! she spent a forlorn half-hour when the others had left; strange terrors oppressed her; a gnawing pain, for which she knew no words, fevered and kept her restless.

What if Roy should die? What if the dear companion of her thoughts, and hopes, should suddenly be snatched from them in the first fervour of youth? Would she ever cease to reproach herself that she had so misunderstood him? Would

ot the consequences of his unhappy recklessness in, they little knew how they stabbed her there) e heavily on her head, however innocent she might win herself?

Perhaps in his boyish way he had wooed her, nd she had failed to comprehend his wooing. Iow many times he had told her that she was earer to him than Olive and Chriss, that she was te sunshine of his home, that he cared for nothing aless Polly shared it; and she had smiled happily rer such evidence of his affection.

Had she ever understood him?

She remembered once that he had brought her me trinket that had pleased his fancy, and insisted her always wearing it for his sake, and she had monstrated with him on its costliness.

"You must not spend all your money on me, It is not right," she had said to him more iously than usual; "you know how Aunt Milly cts to extravagance; and then it will make the spealous, you know. I am not your sister your real sister, I mean."

If you were, I should not have bought you he had answered, laughing, and clasping it boyish force on her arm. "Polly, what a

child you are! when will you be grown up?" and there was an expression in his eyes that she had not understood.

A hundred such remembrances seemed crowding upon her. Would other girls have been as blind in her place? Would they not have more rightly interpreted the loving looks and words that of late he had lavished upon her? Doubtless in his own way he had been wooing her, but no such thought had entered her mind, never till she had heard his bitter words, "You are Heriot's now, Polly," had she even vaguely comprehended his meaning.

And now she had gone near to break his heart and her own too, for if Roy should die, she verily believed that hers would be broken by the sheer weight of remorseful pity. Ah, if he would only live, and she might care for him as though he were her own brother, how happy they might be still, for Polly's heart was still loyal to her guardian. But this suspense was not to be borne, and, unable to control her restlessness any longer, Polly moved with cautious steps across the room, and peeped fearfully into the dark passage.

She knew exactly where Roy's room was. He had often described to her the plan of the cottage. Across the passage was a little odd-shaped room,

full of cupboards, which was Mrs. Madison's sittingroom. The kitchen was behind, and to the left there was a small garden-room where the young men kept their boots, and all manner of miscellaneous rubbish, in company with Mrs. Madison's geraniums and cases of stuffed birds.

A few winding, crooked stairs led to Roy's room; Mr. Dugald's was a few steps higher; beyond, there was a perfect nest of rooms hidden down a dark passage; there were old musty cupboards everywhere; a clear scent of dry lavender pervaded the upper regions; a swinging lamp burnt dimly in a sort of alcove leading to Roy's room. As Polly groped her way cautiously, a short, yapping sound was distinctly audible, and a little black-and-tan terrier came from somewhere.

Polly knelt down and coaxed the creature to approach: she knew it was Sue, Roy's dog, whom he had rescued from drowning; but the animal only whined and shivered, and went back to her lair, outside her master's door.

"Sue is more faithful to him than I," thought the girl, with a sigh. The studio seemed more cheerful than the dark, cold passage. Sue's repulse had saddened her still more. When Dr. Heriot returned some time afterwards, he found her curled up in the great arm-chair, with her face buried in her hands, not crying, as he feared, but with pale cheeks and wide distended eyes that he was troubled to see.

"My poor Polly," smoothing her hair caressingly. Polly sprang up.

"Oh, Heriot, how long you have been. I have been so frightened; is he—will he live?" the stammering lips not disguising the terrible anxiety.

"There is no doubt of it; but he has been very ill. No, my dear child, you need not fear I shall misunderstand you," as Polly tried to hide her happy face, every feature quivering with the joyful relief. "You cannot be too thankful, too glad, for he has had a narrow escape. Aunt Milly will have her hands full for some time."

"I thought if he died that it would be my fault," she faltered, "and then I could not have borne it."

"Yes—yes—I know," he returned, soothingly; "but now this fear is removed, you will be our Heartsease again, and cheer us all up. I cannot bear to see your bright face clouded. You will be yourself again, Polly, will you not?"

"I will try," she returned, lifting up her face to be kissed like a child. She had never but once offered him the most timid caress, and this maidenly reserve and shyness had been sweet to him; but now he told himself it was different. Alas! he knew her better than she knew herself, and there was sadness in his looks, as he gently bade her good night. She detained him with some surprise. "Where are you going, Heriot? you know there is plenty of room; Richard said so."

"I shall watch in Roy's room to-night," he replied. "Richard looks worn out, and Aunt Milly must recruit after her journey. I shall not leave till the middle of the day to-morrow, so we shall have plenty of time to talk. You must rest now."

"Are you going away to-morrow?" repeated Polly, looking blank. "I—I had hoped you would stay."

"My child, that would be impossible; but Richard will remain for a few days longer. I will promise to come back as soon as I can."

"But—but if you leave me—oh, you must not leave me, Heriot," returned the girl, with sudden inexplicable emotion; "what shall I do without you?"

"Have I grown so necessary to you all at once?" he returned, and there was an accent of reproach in his voice. "Nay, Polly, this is not

like your sensible little self; you know I must go back to my patients."

"Yes, I know; but all the same I cannot bear to let you go; promise me that you will come back soon—very soon—before Roy gets much better."

"I will not leave you longer than I can help," he replied, earnestly, distressed at her evident pain at losing him, but steadfast in his purpose to leave her unfettered by his presence. "Now, sweet one, you must not detain me any longer, as to-night I am Roy's nurse," and with that she let him leave her.

There was a bright fire in the room where Mildred and she were to sleep. When Mrs. Madison had lighted the tall candlesticks on the mantelpiece, and left her to finish her unpacking, Polly tried to amuse herself by imagining what Olive would think of it all.

It was a long, low room, with a corner cut off. All the rooms at The Hollies were low and oddly shaped, but the great four-post bed, with the moreen hangings, half filled it.

As far as curiosities went, it might have resembled either the upper half of a pawnbroker's window, or a mediæval corner in some shop i Wardour Street, such a medley of odds and ends were never found in one room. A great, black, carved wardrobe, which Roy was much given to rave about in his letters home, occupied one side; two or three spindle-legged and much dilapidated chairs, dating from Queen Anne's time, with an oaken chest, filled up all available space; but wardrobe, mantelpiece, and even washstand, served as receptacles for the mere breakable objects.

Peacocks' feathers and an Indian canoe were suspended over the dim little oblong glass. Underneath, a Japanese idol smiled fiendishly; the five senses, and sundry shepherdesses in China, danced round him like wood-nymphs round a satyr; a tea-pot, a hunting-watch, and an emu's egg garnished the toilet-table; over which hung a sampler, worked by Mrs. Madison's grandmother; two little girls in wide sashes, with a long-eared dog, simpered in wool-work; a portrait of some Madison deceased, in a short-waisted tartan satin, and a velvet hat and feathers, hung over them.

The face attracted Polly in spite of the grotesque dress and ridiculous head-gear—the feathers would have enriched a hearse; under the funeral plumes smiled a face still young and pleasant, it gave one he impression of a fresh healthy nature; the ruddy

cheeks and buxom arms, with plenty of soft muscle, would have become a dairymaid.

"I wonder," mused the girl, with a sort of sorrowful humour, "who this Clarice was-Mrs. Madison's grandmother or great-grandmother most likely, for of course she married, that broad, smiling face could not belong to an old maid; she was some squire or farmer's wife most likely, and he bought her that hat in London when they went up to see the Green Parks, and St. James's, and Greenwich Hospital, and Vauxhall,—she had a double chin, and got dreadfully stout, I know, before she was forty. And I wonder," she continued, with unconscious pathos, "if this Clarice liked the squire, or farmer, or whatever he may be, as I like Dr. Heriot. Or if, when she was young, she had an adopted brother who gave her pain; she looks as though she never knew what it was to be unhappy or sorry about anything."

Polly's fanciful musings were broken presently by Mildred's entrance; she accosted the girl cheerfully, but there was no mistaking her pale, harassed looks.

"It is nearly twelve, you ought not to have waited for me, my dear; there was so much to do—and then Richard kept me."

- "Where is Richard?" asked Polly, abruptly.
- "He has gone to bed; he is to have Mr. Dugald's room. Dr. Heriot is sitting up with Roy."
- "Yes, I know. Oh, Aunt Milly, he says there is no doubt of his living, the inflammation has subsided, and with care he has every hope of him."
- "Thank God! He will tell his father so; we none of us knew of his danger till it was past, and so we were saved Richard's terrible suspense; he has been telling me about it. I never saw him more cut up about anything—it was a sharper attack than we believed."
  - "Could he speak to you, Aunt Milly?"
- "Only a word or two, and those hardly audible; the breathing is still so oppressed that we dare not let him try—but he made me a sign to kiss him, and once he took hold of my hand; he likes to see us there."
- "He did not mind Dr. Heriot then?" and Polly turned to the fire to hide her sudden flush, but Mildred did not notice it.
- "He seemed a little agitated I thought, but Dr. Heriot soon succeeded in calming him; he managed beautifully. I am sure Roy likes having him, though once or twice he looked pained—at

least, I fancied so; but you have no idea what Dr. Heriot is in a sick-room," and Mildred paused in some emotion.

She felt it was impossible to describe to Polly the skilful tenderness with which he had tended Roy; the pleasant cordiality which had evaded awkwardness, the exquisite sympathy that dealt only with present suffering; no, it could only be stored sacredly in her memory, as a thing never to be forgotten.

The girl drooped her head as Mildred spoke.

"I am finding out more every day what he is, but one will never come to the bottom of his goodness," she said, humbly. "Aunt Milly, I feel more and more how unworthy I am of him," and she rested her head against Mildred and wept.

There was a weary ring in Mildred's voice as she answered her.

"He would not like to hear you speak so despairingly of his choice; you must make yourself worthy of him, dear Polly."

"I will try—I do try, till I get heartsick over my failures. I know when he is disappointed, or thinks me silly, he gives me one of his quiet looks that seem to read one through and through, and then all my courage goes. I do so long to tell him sometimes that he must be satisfied with me just as I am, that I shall never get wiser or better, that I shall always be Polly, and nothing more."

- "Only his precious little Heartsease!"
- "No," she returned, sighing, "I fear that has gone too. I feel so sore and unhappy about all this. Does he—does Roy know I am here?"
- "No, no, not yet; he is hardly strong enough to bear any excitement. It will be very dull for you, my child, for you will not even have my company."
- "Oh, I shall not mind it—not much I mean," returned Polly, stoutly.

But, nevertheless, her heart sank at the prospect before her; she would not see him perhaps for weeks, she would only see Mildred by snatches, she would be debarred from Dr. Heriot's society; it was a dreary thought for the affectionate girl, but her resolution did not falter, things would look brighter by the morning light as Mildred told her, and she fell asleep, planning occupation for her solitary days.

Dr. Heriot's watch had been a satisfactory one, and he was able to report favourably of the invalid. Roy still suffered greatly from the accelerated and oppressed breathing and distressing cough, but the restlessness and fever had abated, and towards morning he had enjoyed some refreshing sleep, and he was able to leave him more comfortably to Mildred and Richard.

He took Polly for a long walk after breakfast, which greatly brightened the girl's spirits, after which Richard and he had a long talk while pacing the lawn under the mulberry trees; both of them looked somewhat pale and excited when they came in, and Richard especially seemed deeply moved.

Polly moped somewhat after Dr. Heriot's departure, but Richard was very kind to her, and gave her all his leisure time; but he was obliged to return to Oxford before many days were over.

Polly had need of all her courage then, but she bore her solitude bravely, and resorted to many ingenious experiments to fill up the hours that hung so heavily on her hands. She wrote daily letters to Olive and Dr. Heriot, kept the studio in dainty order, gathered little inviting bouquets for the sick-room, and helped Mrs. Madison in concocting invalid messes.

By and by, as she grew more skilful, all Roy's food was dressed by her hands. Polly would arrange the tray with fastidious taste, and carry it up herself to the alcove in defiance of all Mildred's warnings.

"I will step so lightly that he cannot possibly cognise my footsteps, and I always wear velvet opers now," she said, pleadingly; and Mildred, liking to damp the girl's innocent pleasure, hdrew the remonstrance in spite of her better gment.

Dr. Heriot had strictly prohibited Polly's visits the sick-room for the present, as he feared the sequences of any great excitement in Roy's kened condition. Polly would stand listening the low weak tones, speaking a word or two at ervals, and Mildred's cheerful voice answering; now and then the terrible cough seemed to ter him, and there would be long deathlike ences; when Polly could bear it no longer, she ald put on her hat, coaxing Sue to follow her, take long walks down the Finchley Road or Hampstead Heath.

Chere was a little stile near The Hollies where loved to linger; below her lay the fields and long, dusty road; all manner of lights gleamed ough the twilight, the dark lane lay behind her; sers-by marvelled at the girl standing there in soft furs with the dog lying at her feet; the air full of warm dampness, a misty moon hung rethe leafless trees.

"I wonder what Heriot is doing," she would say to herself; "his letters are beautiful—just what I expected, they refresh me to read them; how care he care for mine in return, as he says he does—Roy liked them, but then——"

Here Polly broke off with a shiver, and Suggrowled at a dark figure coming up the field-path.

"Come, Sue, your master will want his tea," cried the girl, waking up from her vague musings, "and no one but Polly shall get it for him. Aun Milly says he always praises Mrs. Madison's cookery;" and she quickened her steps with little laugh.

Polly was only just in time; before her preparations were completed the bell rang in the sick-room—

"There, it is ready; I will carry it up. Nevermind me, Mrs. Madison, it is not very heavy," cried the girl, bustling and heated, and she took up the tray with her strong young arms, but, in her hurry, the velvet slippers had been forgotten.

Mildred started with dismay at the sound of the little tapping heels. Would Roy recognise it Yes, a flush had passed over his wan face; he trie to raise himself feebly, but the incautious movemen brought on a fit of coughing.

Mildred passed a supporting arm under the

pillows, and waited patiently till the paroxysm had passed.

"Dear Rex, you should not have tried to raise ourself—there, lean back, and be quiet a moment you have recovered," and she wiped the cold rops of exhaustion from his forehead.

But he still fought with his struggling breath.

"Was it she—was it Polly?" he gasped.

"Yes," returned Mildred, alarmed at his excessive sitation and unable to withhold the truth; "but ou must not talk just now."

"Just one word; when did she come?" he hispered, faintly.

"With me; she has been here all this time. It her cookery, not Mrs. Madison's, that you have een praising so highly. No, you must not see her et," answering his wistful glance, "you are so eak that Dr. Blenkinsop has forbidden it at resent; but you will soon be better, dear," and was a proof of his weakness that Roy did not intest the point.

But the result of Polly's imprudence was less remful than she had feared. Roy grew less restss. From that evening he would lie listening for rurs to the light footsteps about the house, his would brighten as they paused at his door.

47

The flowers that Polly now ventured to lay on his tray were always placed within his reach; he would lie and look at them contentedly. Once a scrap of white paper attracted his eyes. However eagerly his thin fingers clutched it. There were only a few words traced on it—"Good-night, me dear brother Roy, I am so glad you are better; but when Mildred was not looking the paper was pressed to his lips and hidden under his pillow.

"You need not move about so quietly, I think he likes to hear you," Mildred said to the girl when she had assured herself that no hurtful effect had been the result of Polly's carelessness, and Polly had thanked her with glistening eyes.

How light her heart grew; she burst into little quavers and trills of song as she flitted about Mrs. Madison's bright kitchen. Roy heard her singing one of his favourite airs, and made Mildred open the door.

"She has the sweetest voice I ever heard," he said with a sigh when she had finished. "Ask her to do that oftener, it is like David's harp to Saul," cried the lad, with tears in his eyes, "it refreshes me."

Once they could hear her fondling the dog in the entry below.

"Dear old Sue, you are such a darling old dog, nd I love you so, though you are too stupid to be aught any tricks," she said, playfully.

When Sue next found admittance into her naster's room Roy called the animal to him with eable voice. "Let her be, I like to have her here," se said, when Mildred would have lifted her from the snow-white counterpane. "Sue loves her master and her master loves Sue," and as the creature thrust its slender nose delightedly into his hand Roy dropped a furtive kiss on the smooth black head.

## CHAPTER VI.

"I CANNOT SING THE OLD SONGS."

"Ask me no more: what answer should I give?
I love not hollow cheek or faded eye:
Yet, O my friend, I will not have thee die!
Ask me no more, lest I should bid thee live;
Ask me no more.

Ask me no more; thy fate and mine are seal'd.

I strove against the stream and all in vain:

Let the great river take me to the main:

No more, dear love, for at a touch I yield;

Ask me no more."

Tennyson's 'Princess'

RICHARD had promised to pay them another visishortly, and one Saturday evening while Polly and Sue were racing each other among the gravel-pit and the furze-bushes of the people's great common and the lights twinkled merrily in the Vale & Health, and the shifting mist shut out the blu distances of Harrow and Pinner, Mildred was charmed as well as startled by the sound of hi voice in the hall.

"Well, Rex, you are getting on famously, I hear

anks to Aunt Milly's nursing," was his cheerful reeting.

Roy shook his head despondingly.

"I should do better if I could see something fferent from these four walls," he returned, with discontented glance round the room that Mildred do made so bright and pretty; "it is absurd seping me moped up here, but Aunt Milly is exorable."

Mildred smiled over her boy's peevishness.

"He does not know what is good for him," she turned, gently, "he always gets restless towards ening. Dr. Blenkinsop has been most strict in adding me keep him from excitement and not to t him talk with any one. This is the first day he as withdrawn his prohibition, and Roy has been his tantrums ever since."

"He said I might go downstairs if only I were pared the trouble of walking," grumbled Roy, who ometimes tyrannised over Aunt Milly—and dearly he loved such tyranny.

"He is more like a spoiled child than ever," she aid, laughing.

"If that be all, the difficulty is soon obviated. can carry him easily," returned Richard, looking own a little sadly at the long gaunt figure before him, looking strangely shrunken in the brilliant dressing-gown that was Roy's special glory; "but I must be careful, you look thin and brittle enough to break."

"May he, Aunt Milly? Oh, I do so long to see the old studio again, and the couch is so much more comfortable than this," his eyes beginning to shine with excitement and his colour varying dangerously.

"Is it quite prudent, Richard?" she asked, hesitatingly. "Had we not better wait till tomorrow?" but Roy's eagerness overbore her scruples.

Polly little knew what surprise was in store for her. Her race over, she walked along soberly, wondering how she should occupy herself that evening. She, too, knew that Dr. Blenkinsop's prohibition had been removed, and had chafed a little restlessly when Mildred had asked her to be patient till the next day. "Aunt Milly is too careful, she does not think how I long to see him," she said, as she walked slowly home. A light streamed across the dark garden when she reached The Hollies; a radiance of firelight and lamplight. "I wonder if Richard has come," thought

Polly, as she stole into the little passage and gently opened the door.

Yes, Richard was there, his square, thick-set figure blocking up the fireplace as he leant in his favourite attitude against the mantelpiece; and there was Aunt Milly, smiling as though something pleased her. And yes, surely that was Roy's wraith wrapped in the gorgeous dressing-gown and supported by pillows.

The blood rushed to the girl's face as she stood for a moment as though spell-bound, but at the sound of her half-suppressed exclamation he turned his head feebly and looked at her.

"Polly" was all he said, but at his voice she had sprung across the room, and as he stretched out his thin hand to her with an attempt at his old smile a low sob had risen to her lips, and utterly overcome by the spectacle of his weakness, she buried her face in his pillows.

Roy's eyes grew moist with sympathy.

"Don't cry, Polly—don't; I cannot bear it," he whispered, faintly.

"Don't, Polly; try to control yourself; this agitation is very bad for him;" and Richard

raised her gently, for a deadly pallor had overspread Roy's features.

"I could not help it," she returned, drying her eyes, "to see him lying there looking so ill. Oh, Rex! it breaks my heart," and the two young creatures almost clung together in their agitation; and, indeed, Roy's hollow blue eyes, and thin, bloodless face had a spectral beauty that was absolutely startling.

"I never thought you would mind so much, Polly," he said, tremulously; and the poor lad looked at her with an eagerness that he could not disguise. "I hardly dared to expect that you could waste so much time and thought on me."

"Oh, Rex, how can you say such unkind things not care—and I have been fretting all this time?"

"That was hardly kind to Heriot, was it?" he said, watching her, and a strange vivid light shown in his eyes. If she had not known before she must have felt then how he loved her; a sudder blush rose to her cheek as he mentioned Dreiteriot's name; involuntarily she moved a little away from him, and Roy's head fell back on the pillow with a sigh.

Neither of them seemed much disposed for speech after that. Roy lay back with closed eyes

and knitted brows, and Polly sat on a low chair watching the great spluttering log and showers of sparks, while Mildred and Richard talked in undertones.

Now and then Roy opened his eyes and looked at her—at the dainty little figure and sweet, thoughtful face; the firelight shone on shielding hand and half-hoop of diamonds. He recognised the ribbon she wore; he had bought it for her, as well as the little garnet ring he had afterwards voted as rubbish. The sight angered He would claim it again, he thought. should wear no gifts of his; the diamonds had overpowered his garnets, just as his poor little love had been crushed by Dr. Heriot's fascination. Adonis, with his sleepy blue eyes and fair moustache and velvet coat, had failed in the contest with the elder man. What was he, after all, but a beggarly artist? No wonder she despised his scraps of ribbon, his paltry gewgaws, and odds and ends of rubbish. "And yet if I had only had my chance," he groaned within himself, "if I had made her, if I had compelled her to understand my meaning." And then his anger melted, as she raised her clear, honest eyes, and looked at him.

"Are you in pain, Rex?—can I move your pillows?" bending over him rather timidly. Poor children! a veil of reserve had fallen between them since Dr. Heriot's name had been mentioned, and she no longer spoke to him with the old fearlessness.

"No, I am not in pain. Come here, Polly; you have not begun to be afraid of me since—since I have been ill?" rather moodily.

"No, Rex, of course not." But she faltered a little over her words.

"Sit down beside me for a minute. What was it you called me in your letter, before I was ill? Something — it looked strangely written by your hand, Polly."

"Brother—my dear brother Rex," almost inaudibly.

"Ah, I remember. It would have made me smile only I was not in the humour for smiling. I did not write back to my sister Polly though. Richard calls you his little sister very often, does he not?"

"Yes, and I love to hear him say it," very earnestly.

"Should you love it if I called you that too?"
he returned, with an involuntary curl of the lip—
"Pshaw! This is idle talk; but sick people wi

have their fancies. I have one at present. I want you not to wear that rubbish any more," touching her hand lightly.

"Oh, Rex—the ring you gave me?" the tears starting to her eyes.

"I never threw a flower away the gift of one that cared for me," he replied, with a weak laugh. "'I never had a dear gazelle but it was sure to marry the market-gardener.' Do you remember Dick Swiveller, Polly, and the many laughs we have lad over him in the old garden at home? Oh, lose days!" checking himself abruptly, for fear e pent-up bitterness might find vent.

- Children, you are talking too much," interposed indred's warning voice, not slow to interpret the ing excitement of Roy's manner.
- One minute more, Aunt Milly," he returned, stily; then, dropping his voice, "The gift must back to the giver. I don't want you to wear ugly little ring any longer, Polly."
- But I prize it so," she remonstrated. "If I we it back to you you will throw it in the fire, or mple on it."
- "On my honour, no; but I can't stand seeing 'Ou wear such rubbish. I will keep it safely—I will indeed, Polly. Do please me in this." And

Polly, who had never refused him anything, drew off the shabby little ring from her finger and handed it to him with downcast eyes. Why should he ask from her such a sacrifice? Every ribbon and every flower he had given her she had hoarded up as though they were of priceless value, and now he had taken from her her most cherished treasure. And Polly's lip quivered so that she could hardly bid him good-night.

Richard, who saw the girl was fretting, tried by every means in his power to cheer her. He threw on another log, placed her little basket-work chair in the most inviting corner, showed her the different periodicals he had brought from Oxford for Roy's amusement, and gave her lively sketches of undergraduate life. Polly showed her interest very languidly; she was mourning the loss of her ring, and thinking how much her long-desired interview with Roy had disappointed her. Would he never be the same to her again? Would this sad misunderstanding always come between them?

How was it she was clinging to him with the old fondness till he had mentioned Dr. Heriot's name, and then their hands had fallen asunder simultaneously?

"Poor Roy, and poor, poor Polly!" she thought, with a self-pity as new as it was painful.

"You are not listening to me, Polly. You are tired, my dear," Richard said at last, in his kind fraternal way.

"No, I am very rude. But I cannot help thinking of Rex; how ill he is, and how terribly wasted he looks!"

"I knew it would be a shock to you. I am thankful that my father's gout prevents him from travelling; he would fret dreadfully over Roy's altered appearance. But we must be thankful that he is as well as he is. I could not help thinking all that night—the night before you and Aunt Milly came — what I should do if we lost him."

"Don't, Richard. I cannot bear to think of it."

"It ought to make us so grateful," he murmured.
"First Olive and then Roy brought back from the very brink of the grave. It is too much goodness; it makes one ashamed of one's discontent." And he sighed involuntarily.

"But it is so sad to see him so helpless. You said he was as light as a child when you lifted him, Richard, and if he speaks a word or two he

coughs. I am afraid Dr. Blenkinsop is right in saying he must go to Hastings for the winter."

"We shall hear what Dr. John says when he comes up next. You expect him soon, Polly?" But Richard, as he asked the question, avoided meeting her eyes. He feared lest this long absence had excited suspicions which he might find difficult to answer.

But Polly's innocence was proof against any such surmises. "I cannot think what keeps him," she returned, disconsolately. "Olive says he is not very busy, and that his new assistant relieves him of half his work."

"And he gives you no reason?" touching the log to elicit another shower of sparks.

"No, he only says that he cannot come at present, and answers all my reproaches with jests—you know his way. I don't think he half knows how I want him. Richard, I do wish you would do something for me. Write to him to-morrow, and ask him to come; tell him I want him very badly, that I never wanted him half so much before."

"Dear Polly, you cannot need him so much as that," trying to turn off her earnestness with a—laugh.

"You do not know—you none of you know—w much I want him," with a strange vehemence her tone. "When he is near me I feel safe—nost happy. Ah!" cried the girl, with a sad stfulness coming into her eyes, "when I see him do not need to remind myself of his goodness d love—I can feel it then. Oh, Richard dear! I him he must come—that I am afraid to be thout him any longer."

A fraid of what? Did she know? Did Richard

She seems very restless without you," he wrote to Sunday afternoon. "I fancy Roy's manner her. He is fitful in his moods—a little table even to her, and yet unable to bear her of his sight. He would be brought down into studio again to-day, though Aunt Milly begged to spare himself. Polly has been trying all afternoon to amuse him, but he will not be used. She has just gone off to the piano, in hope of singing him to sleep. Rex tyrannises us all dreadfully."

Or. Heriot sighed over Richard's letter, but he cle no attempt to facilitate his preparations for mg to London; he was reading things by a relight now, this failure of his was a sore sub-

dawning slowly before him, he could not bear to think of the tangled web he had so unthinkingly woven, it would need careful unravelling, he thought; and so curious is the mingled warp and woof in the mind of a man like John Heriot, that while his heart yearned for Mildred with the strong passion of his nature, he felt for his young betrother a tenderness for which there was no name, and the thought of freeing himself and her was painful in the extreme.

He longed to see her again and judge for himself, but he must be patient for a while, he knew; so though Polly pleaded for his presence almost passionately, he still put her off on some pretext or other,—nor did he come till a strong letter of remonstrance from Mildred reached him, reproaching him for his apparent neglect, and begging him to recall the girl, as their present position was not good for her or Roy.

Mildred was constrained to take this step, urged by her pity for Polly's evident unhappiness.

That some struggle was passing in the girl's mind was now evident. Was she becoming shaken in her loyalty to Dr. Heriot? Mildred grew alarmed; she saw that while Roy's invalid fancies

were obeyed with the old Polly-like docility and sweetness, that she shrank at times from him as though she were afraid to trust herself with him; sometimes at a look or word she would rise from his side and go to the piano and sing softly to herself some airs that Dr. Heriot loved.

"You never sing my old favourites now, Polly," Roy said once, rather fretfully, "but only those old things over and over again!"

"I like to sing these best," she said, hastily; and then, as he still pressed the point, she pushed the music from her, and hurried out of the room.

But Mildred had another cause for uneasiness which she kept to herself. There was no denying that Roy was very slow in regaining strength. Dr. Blenkinsop shook his head, and looked more dissatisfied every day.

"I don't know what to make of him," he owned to Mildred, one day, as they stood in the porch together.

It was a mild December afternoon; a red wintry sun hung over the little garden; a faint crescent moon rose behind the trees; underneath the window a few chrysanthemums shed a soft blur of violet and dull crimson; a slight wind stirred the hair from Mildred's temples, showing a streak of vol. III.

grey; but worn and thin as she looked, Dr. Blenkinsop thought he had never seen a face that pleased him better.

"What a Sister of Mercy she would make," he often thought; "if I know anything of human nature, this woman has known a great sorrow; she has been taught patience in a rough school; no matter how that boy tries her, she has always cheerful answer ready for him."

Dr. Blenkinsop was in rather a bad humour this afternoon, a fact that was often patent enough to his patients, whom he was given to treat on sucleoccasions with some brusquerie, but with all his oddities and contradictions, they dearly loved him -

"I can't make him out at all," he repeated, irritably, feeling his iron-grey whiskers, a trick of his when anything discomposed him; "there is no fault to find with his constitution; he has had a sharp bout of illness, brought on, as far as I can make out, by his own imprudence, and just as he has turned the corner nicely, and seems doing us all credit, he declines to make any further progress!"

"But he is really better, Dr. Blenkinsop; he coughs far less, and his sleep is less broken, he has no appetite, certainly, but——" Mildred stopped-

She thought herself that Roy had been losing ground lately.

- Dr. Blenkinsop fairly growled,—he had little sharp white teeth that showed almost savagely when he was in one of his surly moods.
- These lymphatic natures are the worst to combat, they succumb so readily to weakness and lep ression; he certainly seems more languid to-day, not there are feverish indications. He has got ot laing on his mind, eh?"—turning round so braptly that Mildred was put out of countenance.

  She hesitated.
- Humph!" was his next observation, "I thought smuch. Of course it is none of my concern, but when I see my patient losing ground without any risible cause, one begins to ask questions. That young lady who assists in the nursing—do you himk her presence advisable, eh?"—with another sharp glance at Mildred.
- "She is his adopted sister—she is engaged," staronmered Mildred, not willing to betray the lad's secret. "They are very fond of each other."
- feverish on one side, I should say. Send her back to the north, and get that nice fellow Richard in her place, that is my advice."

And acting on this very broad hint, Mildred soon afterwards wrote to Dr. Heriot to recall Polly.

When Dr. Blenkinsop had left her, she did not at once return to the studio; through the closed door she could hear Polly striking soft chords on the piano. Roy had seemed drowsy, and she trusted the girl's murmuring voice would lull him to sleep.

It was not often that she left them together; but this afternoon her longing for a little fresh air tempted her to undertake some errands that were needed for the invalid; and leaving a message with Mrs. Madison that she would be back to the early tea, she set off in the direction of the old town.

It was getting rapidly dusk as the little gate swung behind Mildred. When Roy roused from his fitful slumber, he could hardly see Polly as she sat at the shabby, square piano.

The girl was touching the notes with listless fingers, her head drooping over the keys; but she suddenly started when she saw the tall gaunt figure beside her in the gorgeous dressing-gown.

"Oh, Rex, this is very wrong," taking hold of one of his hot hands, and trying to lead him back to the sofa, "when you know you cannot stand, and that the least movement makes you cough. Put your

hand on my shoulder; lean on me. Oh, I wish I were as strong and tall as Aunt Milly."

"I like you best as you are," he replied, but he did not refuse the support she offered him. "I could not see you over there, only the outline of your dress. You never wear your pretty dresses now, Polly?" reproachfully. "I suppose because Heriot is not here."

"Indeed—indeed—you must not stand any longer, Rex. You must lie down at once, or I shall tell Aunt Milly," she returned, evasively.

He was always making these sort of speeches to her, and to-night she felt as though she could not bear them; but Roy was not to be silenced. Never once had she mentioned Dr. Heriot's name to him, and with an odd tenacity he wanted to make her say it. What did she call him? had she learnt to say his Christian name? would she pronounce it with a blush, faltering over it as girls do? or would she speak it glibly as with long usage?

"I suppose you keep them all for him," he continued, with a suspicion of bitterness in his tone; "that little nun-like grey dress is good enough for Aunt Milly and me. Too much colour would be bad for weak eyes, eh, Polly?"

"I dress for him, of course," trying to defend

herself with dignity; but the next moment she waxed humble again. "I—I am sorry you do not like the dress, Rex," she faltered. "I should like to please you both if I could," and her eyes filled with tears.

"I think you might sing sometimes to please me when he is not here," he returned, obstinately "just one song, Polly; my favourite one, with the sad, sweet refrain."

"Oh, not that one," she repeated, beginning to tremble; "choose something else, Rex — not that."

"No, I will have that or none," he replied, irritably. What had become of Roy's sweet temper? "You seem determined not to please me in anything," and he moved away.

Polly watched his tottering steps a moment, and then she sprang after him.

"Oh, Rex, do not be so cross with me; do not refuse my help," she said, winding her arm round him, and compelling him to lean on her. "There, you have done yourself mischief," as he paused, overcome by a paroxysm of coughing. "How can you—how can you be so unkind to me, Rex?"

He did not answer; perhaps, absorbed in his

own trouble, he hardly knew how he tried her; but as he sank back feebly on the cushions, he whispered—

- "You will sing it, Polly, will you not?"
- "Yes, yes; anything, if you will only not be angry with me," returned the poor girl, as she hurried away.

The air was a mournful one, just suited to the words:—

- "Ask me no more: what answer should I give?
  I love not hollow cheek or faded eye:
  Yet, O my friend, I will not have thee die!
  Ask me no more, lest I should bid thee live;
  Ask me no more."
- Polly, come here! come to me, Polly!" for, overcome by a sudden revulsion of feeling, Polly had broken down, and hidden her face in her hands; and now a stifled sob reached Roy's ear.
  - "'Polly, I dare not move, and I only want to ask you to forgive me," in a remorseful voice; and the girl obeyed him reluctantly.
  - "What makes you so cruel to me?" she panted, looking at him with sad eyes, that seemed to pierce his selfishness. "It is not my fault if you are so unhappy—if you will not get well."
  - The plaintive rhythm still haunted her. Was she,

after all, so much to blame? Was she not suffering too? Why should he lay this terrible burden on her? It was selfish of him to die and leave her to her misery.

Roy fairly quailed beneath the girl's indignation and passionate sorrow.

"Have I been so hard to you, Polly?" he said humbly. "Are men ever hard to the women the love? There, the murder is out. You must leave me, Polly; you must go back to Heriot. I am too weak to hide the truth any longer. You must not stay and listen to me," pushing her away with weak force.

It was his turn to be agitated now.

"Leave me!" he repeated, "it is not loyal to Heriot to listen to a fool's maundering, which has not the wit or the strength to hide. I should only frighten you with my vehemence, and do good. Aunt Milly will be here directly. Leave me, I say."

But she only clung to him, and called ham brother. Alas! how could she leave him!

By and by he grew calmer.

"Forgive me, Polly; I am not myself; I oug Int not to have made you sing that song."

"No, Rex," in a voice scarcely audible.

- "When you go back to Heriot you must tell him. Ask him not to be hard on me. I never sant to injure him. The man you love is sacred my eyes. It was only for a little while I hated m."
- "I will not tell him that."
- "Listen to me, dear! I ask his pardon, and urs too, for having betrayed myself. I have ed like a weak fool to-night. You were wiser I, Polly."
- There is nothing to forgive," she returned, softly. Teriot will not be angry with you; he knows are ill, and I—I will try to forget it. But you st get well, Rex; you will promise to get well my sake."
- "Shall you grieve very much if I do not? riot would comfort you, if I did not, lly."
- She made an involuntary movement towards him, I then checked herself.
- "Cruel! cruel!" she said, in a voice that unded dead and cold, and her arms fell to her le.

He melted at that.

"There, I have hurt you again. What a selfish etch I am. I shall make a poor thing of life;

but I will promise not to die if I can help it. You shall not call me cruel again, Polly."

Then she smiled, and stretched out her hand whim.

"I would not requite your goodness so badly so that. You could always do as you liked with me in the old days, Polly—turn me round your little finger. If you tell me to get well I suppose I must try; but the best part of me is gone."

She could not answer him. Every word went through her tender heart like a stab. What avail were her love and pity? Never should she be able to comfort him again; never would her sweet sisterly ministrations suffice for him. She must not linger by his side; her eyes were open now.

"Good-bye, Roy," she faltered. She hardly knew what she meant by that farewell. Was she going to leave him? Was she only saying goodbye to the past, to girlhood, to all manner of fond foolish dreams? She rose with dry eyes when she had uttered that little speech, while he lay watching her.

"Do you mean to leave me?" he asked, sorrowfully, but not disputing her decision.

"Perhaps—yes—what does it matter?" she answered, moving drearily away.

What did it matter, indeed! Her fate and his were sealed. Between them stretched a gulf, long as life, impassable as death; and even her innocent love might not span it.

"I shall not go to him, and he will not return to me," she said, paraphrasing the words of the royal mourner to harmonise with her measure of pain. "Never while I live shall I have my brother Roy again."

Poor little aching, childish heart, dealing for the first time with life's mysteries, comprehending now the relative distinction between love and gratitude, and standing with reluctant feet on the edge of an unalterable resolve. What sorrow in after years ever equalled this blank?

When Mildred returned she found a very desolate scene awaiting her; the fire had burnt low, a waste of dull red embers filled the grate, the moon shone through the one uncurtained window; a mass of drapery stirred at her entrance, a yawning figure stretched itself under the oriental quilt.

Roy, were you asleep? The fire is nearly out. Where is Polly?"

"I do not know. She left the room just now," he returned, with a sleepy inflection; but to Mildred's delicate perception it did not ring true.

She said nothing, however, raked the embers together, threw on some wood, and lighted the lamps.

Had he really slept? There was no need to ask the question; his burning hand, the feverish light of his eyes, the compressed lips, the baffled and tortured lines of the brow, told her another story; she leant over him, pressing them out with soft fingers.

"Rex, my poor boy!"

"Aunt Milly, she has bidden me good-bye," broke out the lad suddenly; "she knows, and she is going back to Heriot; and I—I am the most miserable wretch alive."

## CHAPTER VII.

## "WHICH SHALL IT BE?"

"She looked again, as one that half afraid Would fain be certain of a doubtful thing; Or one beseeching, 'Do not me upbraid!' And then she trembled like the fluttering Of timid little birds, and silent stood."

Jean Ingelow.

DR. HERIOT started for London the day after he had received Mildred's letter; as he intended, his appearance took them all by surprise.

Mildred was the first to detect the well-known footsteps on the gravelled path; but she held her peace. Dr. Heriot's keen glance, as he stood on the threshold, had time to scan the features of the little fireside group before a word of greeting had crossed his lips; he noticed Polly's listless attitude as she sat apart in the dark window-seat, and the moody restlessness of Roy's face as he lay furtively watching her. Even Mildred's heightened colour, as she bent industriously over her work, was not lost on him.

"Polly!" he said, crossing the room, arz < marvelling at her unusual abstraction.

At the sound of the kind, well-known voice, the girl started violently; but as he stooped over her and kissed her, she turned very white, and involuntarily shrank from him, but the next moment she clung to him almost excitedly.

"Oh, Heriot, why did you not come before? You knew I wanted you,—you must have known how I wanted you."

"Yes, dear, I knew all about it," he replied, quietly, putting away the little cold hands that detained him, and turning to the others.

A few kind inquiries after the invalid were met at first very irritably, but even Roy's moody jealousy could not be proof against such gentleness, and he forgot his wretchedness for a time while listening to home messages, and all the budget of Kirkby Stephen gossip which Dr. Heriot retailed over the cosy meal that Mildred provided for the traveller.

For once Dr. Heriot proved himself an inexhaustible talker; there was no limit to his stock of anecdotes. Roy's sulkiness vanished; he grew interested, almost amused.

"You remember old Mrs. Parkinson and her

er-cakes, Polly," he said, with a weak ghost of 1gh; but then he checked himself with a frown. Ow was it one could not hate this fellow, who defrauded him of Polly?" he thought, clench; his hand impatiently. "Why was he to coumb to a charm of manner that had worked n such woe?"

Dr. Heriot's fine instinct perceived the lad's nsition of mood.

"Yes, Polly has a faithful memory for an old end," he said, answering for the girl, who sat ir him with a strip of embroidery from which had not once raised her eyes. As he looked at this face worked with some strong emotion; eyes softened, and then grew sad.

"Polly is Faith itself," speaking with peculiar onation, and laying his hand on the small ning head. "You see I have a new name for a to-night, Heartsease."

"I think I will go to bed, Aunt Milly," broke t poor Roy, growing suddenly pale and haggard.

— I am tired, and it is later to-night, I nk."

Dr. Heriot made no effort to combat his resoion. He stood aside while Mildred offered her to the invalid. He saw Polly hurriedly slip

her hand in Roy's, who wrung it hard with a sort of laugh.

"It is good-bye for good and all, I suppose, to-night?" he said. "Heriot means to take you away, of course?"

But Polly did not answer; she only hid her red quivering hand under her work, as though she feared Dr. Heriot would see it.

But the next moment the work was thrown lightly to the ground, and Dr. Heriot's fingers were gently stroking the ill-used hand.

"Poor little Polly; does he often treat you to such a rough hand-shake?" he said, with a half-amused, tender smile.

"No, never," she stammered; but then, stammered; bu

"Is that why you have been so silent?" draving her nearer to him as she stood beside him on the rug. "Little Heartsease, did you like my new name?"

"Don't, Heriot; I—I do not understand you; I have not been faithful at least."

"Not in your sense of the word, perhaps, dear

olly, but in mine. What if your faithfulness should we us both from a great mistake?"

"I—I do not understand you," she said again, bking at him with sad, bewildered eyes. "You all talk to me presently; but now I want to eak to you. Heriot, I was wrong to come here, ong and self-willed. Aunt Milly was right, I ve done no good. Oh, it has all been so miserable mistake from beginning to end; and then I ought you would never come."

- "Dear Polly, it could not be helped. Neither I stay now."
- 'You will not go and leave me again?" she 1, faltering and becoming very pale. "Heriot, 1 must take me with you; promise me that you 1 take me with you."
- 'I cannot, my dear child. Indeed—indeed—I not."
- "Then I will go alone," she said, throwing back head proudly, but trembling as she spoke. "I I not stay here without you—not for a day—not a single day."
- But Roy wants you. You cannot leave him il he is better," he said, watching her; but though coloured perceptibly, she stood her ground.

"I was wrong to come," she returned, piteously. "I cannot help it if Rex wants me. I know he does. You are saying this to punish me, and because I have failed in my duty."

"Hush, my child; I at least have not reproached you."

"No, you never reproach me; you are kindness itself. Heriot," laying down her face on his arm, and now he knew she was weeping, "I never knew until lately how badly I have treated you. You ought not to have chosen a child like me. I have tried your patience, and given you no return for your goodness; but I am resolved that all this shall be altered."

"Is it in your power, Polly?" speaking now more gravely.

"It must\_it shall be. Listen to me, dear \_\_\_\_ You asked me once to make no unnecessary delay but to be your wife at once. Heriot, I am read \_\_\_\_\_ now."

"No, my child, no."

"Ah, but I am," speaking with difficulty througher sobs. "I never cared for you so much. I never wanted you so much. I am so full of gratude—I long to make you so happy—to make somebody happy. You must take me away from

e, where Roy will not make me miserable any re, and then I shall try to forget him-his happiness, I mean—and to think only of you." "Poor child," speaking more to himself than to

or: "and this is to what I have brought her."

"You must not be angry with Roy," continued ne young girl, when her agitation had a little ibsided. "He could not help my seeing what he It; and then he told me to go back to you. He s tried his hardest, I know he has; every night I rayed that you might come and take me away, and every morning I dreaded lest I should be sappointed. Heriot, it was cruel—cruel to leave e so long."

"And you will come back with me now?"

"Oh, yes," with a little sighing breath.

"And I am to make you my wife? I am not wait for your nineteenth birthday?"

"No. Oh, Heriot, how self-willed and selfish I ₹8."

"Neither one nor the other. Listen to me, dear olly. Nay, you are trembling so that you can urdly stand; sit beside me on this couch; it is y turn to talk now. I have a little story to tell יי. מו

<sup>&</sup>quot; A story, Heriot?"

"Yes; shall we call it 'The Guardian's Mistake'? I am not much of a hand in story-telling, but I hope I shall make my meaning clear. What, afraid, my child? nay, there is no sad ending to this story of mine; it runs merrily to the tune of wedding bells."

"I do not want to hear it," she said, shrinking nervously; but he, half-laughingly and half-seriously, persisted:—

"Once upon a time, shall we say that, Polly? Little Heartsease, how pale you are growing. Once upon a time, a great many years ago, a man committed a great mistake that darkened his after life.

"He married a woman whom he loved, but whose heart he had not won. Not that he knew that. Heaven forbid that any one calling himself a man should do so base a thing as that; but his wishes and his affection blinded him, and the result was misery for many a year to come."

"But he grew comforted in time," interrupted Polly, softly.

"Yes, time, and friendship, and other blessings, bestowed by the good God, healed the bitterness of the wound, but it still bled inwardly. He was a weary-hearted man, with a secret disgust of life,

and full of sad loathing for the empty home that sheltered his loneliness, all the more," as Polly pressed closer to him, "that he was one who had ever craved for wife and children.

"It was at this time, just as memory was growing faint, that a certain young girl, the daughter of an old college friend of his, was left to his care. Think, Polly, how sacred a charge to this desolate man; a young orphan, alone in the world, and dependent on his care."

"Heriot, I beseech you to stop; you are breaking my heart."

"Nay, dearest, there is nothing sad in my story; there are only wheels within wheels, a complication heightening the interest of the plot. Well, was it a wonder that this man, this nameless hero of ours, a species of Don Quixote in his way, should weave a certain sweet fancy into his dreary life, that he should conceive the idea of protecting and loving this young girl in the best way he could by making her his wife, thinking that he would make himself and her happy, but always thinking most of her?"

"Oh, Heriot, no more; have pity on me."

"What, stop in the middle of my story, and before my second hero makes his appearance? For shame, Heartsease; but this man, for all his wise plans and benevolent schemes, proved himse miserably blind.

"He knew that this girl had an adopted broth whom she loved dearly. Nay, do not hide you face, Polly; no angel's love could have been pur than this girl's for this friend of hers; but also what no one had foreseen had already happened unknown to her guardian, and to herself, this your man had always loved, and desired to win her folia wife."

"She never knew it," in a stifled voice.

"No, she never knew it, any more than sknew her own heart. Why do you start, Hearease? Ah, she was so sure of that, so certain her love for her affianced husband, that when sknew her friend was ill, she pleaded to be allow to nurse him. Yes, though she had found o then the reason of his unhappiness."

"She hoped to do good," clasping her hanc before her face.

"True, she hoped to do good; she fancied, nc knowing the world and her own heart, that she could win him back to his old place, and so kee them both, her guardian and her friend. And he guardian, heart-sick at the mistake he had made and with a new and secret sorrow preying upo-

him, deliberately suffered her to be exposed to the ordeal which her own generous imprudence had planned."

"Heriot, one moment; you have a secret sorrow?"

"Not an incurable one, my sweet; you shall know it by and by; if I do not mistake, it will yield us a harvest of joy; but I am drawing near the end of the story."

"Yes, you have quite finished—there is nothing more to say; nothing, Heriot."

"You shall tell me the rest, then," he returned, gravely. "Was she true to her guardian, this girl; true in every fibre and feeling? or did her faithful heart really cleave to the companion of her youth, calling her love by the right name, and knowledging it without fear?

"Polly, this is no time for a half-truth; which all it be? Is your heart really mine, or does it belong to Roy?"

She would have hidden her face in her hands, but he would not suffer it.

"Child, you must answer me; there must be shadow between us," he said, holding her before bim. There was a touch of sternness in his voice; but as she raised her eyes appealingly to his, she

read there nothing but pity and full understanding; for one moment she stood irresolute, with palpitating heart and white quivering lips, and then she threw herself into his arms.

"Oh, Heriot, what shall I do? What shall I do? I love you both, but I love Roy best."

When Mildred re-entered the room, an hour later, somewhat weary of her banishment, she found the two still talking together. Polly was sitting in her little low chair, her cheek resting on her hand. Dr. Heriot seemed speaking earnestly, but as the door opened, he broke off hastily, and the girl started to her feet.

"I must go now," she whispered; "don't tell Aunt Milly to-night. Oh, Heriot, I am so happy this seems like some wonderful dream; I don't half believe it."

"We must guard each other's confidence. Remember, I have trusted you, Polly," was his answer, in a low tone. "Good night, my deares thild; sleep well, and say a prayer for me."

"I do—I do pray for you always," she affirmed looking at him with her soul in her eyes; but a he merely pressed her hand kindly, she suddenly raised herself on tiptoe and kissed his cheek

r—dear Heriot, I shall pray for you all my ng."

re you going, Polly?" asked Mildred, in ise.

es, I am tired. I cannot talk any more to-"returned the girl, hastily.

r face was pale, as though she had been ng; but her eyes smiled radiantly under the shes.

ldred turned to the fire, somewhat dissatisfied. hope things are right between you and "she said, anxiously, when she and Dr. t were left alone.

hey have never been more so," he replied, a mischievous smile; "for the first time we ighly understand ourselves and each other; a dear good child, and deserves to be." But as Mildred, somewhat bewildered at mbiguous tone, would have questioned him farther, he gently but firmly changed the t.

was a strange evening to Mildred; outside, in lashed the panes. Dr. Heriot had drawn m-chair nearer to the glowing fire; he looked and weary—some conflicting feelings seemed er him with sadness. Mildred, sitting at her

little work-table, scarcely dared to break the silence. Her own voice sounded strange to her. One when she looked up she saw his eyes were fixed upon her, but he withdrew them again, and relapsed into his old thoughtfulness.

By and by he began to talk, and then she laid down her work to listen. Some strange chord of the past seemed stirred in the man's heart to-night. All at once he mentioned his mother; her name was Mildred, he said, looking into the embers as he spoke; and a little sister whom they had lost in her childhood had been called Milly too. For their sakes the name had always been dear to him. She was a good woman, he said, but her one fault in his eyes had been that she had never loved Margaret; a certain bitter scene between them had banished his widowed mother from his house. Margaret had not understood her, and they were better apart; but it had been a matter of grief to him.

And then he began to talk of his wife—at first hesitatingly—and then, as Mildred's silent sympathy seemed to open the long-closed valves, the repressed sorrow of years began to find vent. Well might Mildred marvel at the secret strength that had sustained the generous heart in its long struggle,

at "the charity that suffered so long." What could there have been about this woman, that even degradation and shame could not weaken his faithful love, that even in his misery he should still pity and cleave to her.

As though answering her thought, Dr. Heriot suddenly placed a miniature in her hand.

"That was taken when I first saw her," he said, softly; "but it does not do her justice; and then, one cannot reproduce that magnificent voice. I have never heard a voice like it."

Mildred bent over it for a moment without speaking; it was the face of a girl taken in the irst flush of her youth; but there was nothing youthful in the face, which was full of a grave natured beauty.

The dark melancholy eyes seemed to rivet Millred's; a wild sorrow lurked in their inscrutable lepths; the brow spoke intellect and power; the mouth had a passionate, irresolute curve. As she looked at it she felt that it was a face that might well haunt a man to his sorrow.

"It is beautiful—beautiful—but it oppresses me," she said, laying it down with a sigh. "I cannot ancy it ever looking happy."

"No," he returned, with a stifled voice. "Her

one trouble embittered her life. I never remember seeing her look really happy till I placed our boy in her arms; he taught her to smile first, and then he died, and our happiness died with him."

"You must try to forget all this now," she said, alluding to his approaching marriage. "It is not well to dwell upon so mournful a past."

"You are right; I think I shall bury it from this night," he returned, with a singular smile. "I feel as though you have done me good, Mildred—Miss Lambert—but now I am selfishly keeping you up, after all your nursing too. Good-night."

He held her hand for a moment in both his; his eyes questioned the pale worn face, anxiously, tenderly.

"When are you going to get stronger? You do me no credit," he said, sadly.

And his look and tone haunted her, in spite o mer efforts. He had called her Mildred too.

"How strange that he should have told me all this about his wife. I am glad he treats me as a friend," she thought. "A little while ago I could not have spoken to him as I have to-night, but his manner puts me at my ease. How can I help loving one of the noblest of God's creatures?"

"Can you trust Roy to me this morning, Miss

Lambert?" asked Dr. Heriot, as they were sitting together after breakfast.

Polly, who was arranging a jar of chrysanthemums, dropped a handful of flowers on the floor, and stooped to pick them up.

"I think Roy will like his old nurse best," she returned, doubtfully.

But Dr. Heriot looked obstinate.

"A new regime and a new prescription might be beneficial," he replied, with a suspicion of a smile. "Roy and I must have some conversation together, and there's no time like the present," and with a grave, mischievous bow, he quietly quitted the room.

"Aunt Milly, I must go and match those wools, and get the books for Roy," began Polly, hurriedly, as they were left alone. "The rain does not matter a bit, and the air is quite soft and warm."

Mildred shook her head.

"You had better wait an hour or two till it clears up," she said, looking dubiously at the wet garden paths and soaking rain. "I am going to my own room to write letters. I have one from Olive that I must answer. If you will wait until the afternoon, Dr. Heriot will go with you."

But Polly was not to be dissuaded; she had

nothing to do, she was restless, and wanted a walk; and Roy must have his third volume when he came down.

It was not often that Polly chose to be wilful, and this time she had her way. Now and them Mildred paused in the midst of her correspondence to wonder what had detained the girl so long—Once or twice she rose and went to the window to see if she could catch a glimpse of the dark—blue cloak and black hat, but hours passed and she did not return.

By and by Dr. Heriot's quick eyes saw a swift shadow cross the studio window; and, as Pollystole noiselessly into the dark passage, she found herself captured.

"Naughty child, where have you been?" he said, removing her wet cloak, and judging for himself that she had sustained no farther damage.

Polly's cheeks, rosy with exercise, paled a little, and she pleaded piteously to be set free.

"Just for a moment, Heriot. Please let me go for a moment. I will come presently."

"You are not to be trusted," he replied, not leaving hold of her. "Do you think this excitement is good for Roy—that in his state he can

ear it. He has been dressed and waiting for you rehours. You must think of him, Polly, not of urself." And Polly resisted no longer.

She followed Dr. Heriot, with downcast eyes, to the studio. Roy was not on his couch; he standing on the rug, in his velvet coat; one in hand grasped the mantelpiece nervously; the rewas stretched out to Polly.

"You must not let him excite himself," was Dr. Criot's warning, as he left them together.

Poor Polly, she stood irresolute, not daring to vance, or look up, and wishing for the ground to allow her.

"Polly—dear Polly—will you not come to me?"

d Roy walked feebly to meet her. Before she

lid move or answer, his arms were round her.

My Polly—my own now," he cried, rapturously

ressing her to him with weak force; "Heriot has

ven you to me."

Polly looked up at her young lover shyly. Roy's face was flushed, his eyes were shining with happiness, a half-proud, half-humble expression lingered round his mouth; the arm that supported her trembled with weakness.

"Oh, Rex, how wrong of me to let you stand," she said, waking up from her bewilderment; "you

must lie down, and I will take my old place besid€ you."

"Yes, he has given you the right to nurse me now," whispered Roy, as she arranged the cushions under his head. "I am more than your adopted brother now." And Polly's happy blush was her only answer.

"You will never refuse to sing to me again?" he said, presently, when their agitation had a little subsided.

"No, and you will let me have my old ring," she returned, softly. "Oh, Rex, I cried half the night, when you would not let me wear it. I never cared so much for my beautiful diamonds."

A misty smile crossed Roy's face.

"No, Polly, I never mean to part with it again-Look here,"—and he showed her the garnets suspended to his watch-chain—"we will exchange rings in the old German fashion, dear. I will keep the garnets, and I will buy you the pearl hoop you admired so much; you must remember, you have chosen only a poor artist."

"Oh, Rex, how I shall glory in your pictures!" cried the girl, breathlessly. "I have always loved them for your sake, but now it will be so different. They will be dearer than ever to me."

never could have worked without you, "returned the young man, humbly. "I, but it was a miserable failure; it was your ish praise that first made me seriously thinking an artist; and when you failed me, all the t seemed to die out of me, just as the sunshine out of a landscape, leaving nothing but a grey

Oh, Polly, even you scarcely know how ched you made me."

Do not let us talk of it," she whispered, pressloser to him; "let us only try to deserve our iness."

That is what he said," replied Roy, in a low. "He told me that we were very young to such a responsibility laid upon us, and that tust help each other. Oh, what a good man "he continued, with some emotion, "and to that at one time I almost hated him."

Cou could not help it," she answered, shyly. er there was no flaw in her young lover; his tience and jealousy; his hot and cold fits that so sorely tried her; his singular outbursts mper, had only been natural under the cirtances; she would have forgiven him harder, than that; but Roy judged himself more

"No, dear, you must not excuse me," was the truthful answer. "I bore my trouble badly, and made every one round me wretched; and now all these coals of fire are heaped upon me. If he had been my brother, he could not have borne with me more gently. Oh," cried the lad, earnestly, "it is something to see into the depths of a good man's heart. I think I saw more than he meant me to do, but time will prove. One thing is certain, that he never loved you as I do, Polly."

"No; it was all a strange mistake," she returned, blushing and smiling; "but hush! here comes Aunt Milly."

"Am I interrupting you?" asked Mildred, & little surprised at Polly's anxious start.

She had moved a little away from Roy; but now he stretched out his hand to detain her.

"No, don't go, Aunt Milly," and a gleam of mischief shot from his blue eyes. "Polly has only been telling me a new version of the old song—'It is well to be off with the old love before you are on with the new.' After all, Polly has found out that she likes me best."

"Children, what do you mean?" returned Mildred, somewhat sternly.

Polly and even Roy were awed by the change in

manner; a sort of spasm crossed her face, and in the features became almost rigid.

"Aunt Milly, don't be angry with us," faltered lly; and her breast heaved a little. Did this arest and gentlest creature, who had stood her the stead of mother, think she was wrong? Listen to me, dear; I would have married priot, but he would not let me; he showed me tat was the truth—that my heart was more Roy's an his, and then he brought us together; it is his doing, not Roy's."

"Yes, it was all my doing," repeated Dr. Heriot, to had followed Mildred in unperceived. "Did not tell you last night that Polly and I never derstood each other so well;" and he put his in round the girl with almost fatherly fondness, he led her to Mildred. "You must blame me, if not this poor child, for all that has happened." But the colour did not return to Mildred's face; seemed utterly bewildered. Dr. Heriot wore inscrutable expression; he looked grave, but to otherwise unhappy.

"I suppose it is all for the best," she said, mewhat unsteadily. "I had hoped that Polly uld have been a comfort to you, but it seems u—you are never to have that."

"It will come to me in time," he returned, with a strange smile; "at least, I hope so."

"Come here, Aunt Milly," interrupted Roy; and as Mildred stooped over her boy he looked up in her face with the old Rex-like smile.

"Dr. Heriot says I should never have lived if it had not been for you, Aunt Milly. You have given me back my life, and he has given me Polly; and," cried the lad, and now his lips quivered, "God bless you both."

## CHAPTER VIII.

## A TALK IN FAIRLIGHT GLEN.

"O finer far! What work so high as mine,
Interpreter betwixt the world and man,
Nature's ungathered pearls to set and shrine,
The mystery she wraps her in to scan;
Her unsyllabic voices to combine,
And serve her with such love as poets can;
With mortal words, her chant of praise to bind,
Then die, and leave the poem to mankind?"

Jean Ingelow.

Dr. Herror did not stay long in London; as soon as his mission was accomplished he set his face resolutely homewards.

Christmas was fast approaching, and it was necessary to make arrangements for Roy's removal to Hastings, and after much discussion and a plentiful interchange of letters between the cottage and the vicarage, it was finally settled that Mildred and Richard should remain with the invalid until Olive and Mr. Lambert should take their place.

Mr. Lambert was craving for a sight of his boy, but he could not feel justified in devolving his duties on his curate until after the Epiphany, nor would Olive consent to leave him; so Mildred bravely stifled her homesick longings, and kept watch over the young lovers, smiling to herself over Roy's boyishness and Polly's fruitless efforts after staidness.

From the low bow-window jutting on to the beach, in the quiet corner where Richard had found them lodgings, she would often sit following the young pair with softly amused eyes as they stood hand in hand with the waves lapping to their feet; at the first streak of sunset they would come slowly up the shore. Roy still tall and gaunt, but with a faint tinge of returning health in his face; Polly fresh and blooming as a rose, and trying hard to stay her dancing feet to fit his feeble paces.

"What have you done with Richard, children?"
Mildred would ask as usual.

"Dick? ah, he decamped long ago, with the trite and novel observation that 'two are company and three none.' We saw him last in the midst of an admiring crowd of fishermen. Dick always knows when he is not wanted, eh, Polly?"

"I am afraid we treat him very badly," returned Polly, blushing. Roy threw himself down on the

such with a burst of laughter. His mirth had ardly died away when his brother entered.

"You have got back, Roy—that's right. I was ust going in search of you. There is a treacherous rind this evening. You were standing still ever o long after I left you."

"That comes of you leaving us, you see," replied toy, slyly. "It took us just half an hour to liscover the reason of your abrupt departure." Lichard's eyes twinkled with dry humour.

"One must confess to being bored at times. Keppel was far more entertaining company than ou and Polly. When I am in despair for a little ensible conversation I must come to Aunt Milly."

Aunt Milly was the universal sympathiser, as usual. Richard's patience would have been sorely out to proof, but for those grave-toned talks in the wintry twilights, with which the grey sea and sky seemed so strangely to harmonise. In spite of his anselfishness, the sight of his brother's happiness could not fail to elicit at times a disturbing sense of contrast. Who could tell what years rolled between him and the fruition of his hope?

"In patience and confidence must be your strength, Richard," Mildred once said, as they stood looking over the dim waste of waters, grey everywhere, save where the white lips touched the shore; behind them was the dark Castle Hill; windy flickers of light came from the esplanade; far out to sea a little star trembled and wavered like the timid pioneer of unknown light; a haze of uncertainty bordered earth and sky; the soft wasked of the insidious waves was tuneful and soothing as a lullaby. The neutral tints, the colourless conditions, neither light nor dark, even the faint wrapping mist that came like a cloud from the sear harmonised with Mildred's feelings as she quoted the text softly. An irrepressible shiver ran through the young man's frame. Waiting, did he not a know what was before him—years of uncertainty.

"Yes, I know," he replied, with an accent of impatience in his voice. "You are right of course one can only wait. As for patience, it is hardy an attribute of youth; one learns it by degrees, but all the same, uncertainty and these low grey skies oppress one. Sea-fog does not enhance cheef-fulness, Aunt Milly. Let us go in."

Richard's moods of discontent were brief and rare. He was battling bravely with his disappointment. He had always been grave and staid beyond his years, but now faintly-drawn lines were plainly

egible in the smooth forehead, and a steady connected light in the brown eyes bore witness to riding and careful thought. At times his brother's reasoning boyishness seemed almost to provoke m; want of earnestness was always a heinous sin his judgment. Roy more than once winced der some unpalatable home-truth which Richard lered in all good faith and with the best intenses in the world.

"Dick is the finest fellow breathing, but if he Duld only leave off sermonising until he is dained," broke out Roy, with a groan, when he did Mildred were alone; but Mildred was too well ware of their affection for each other to be made Deasy by any petulance on Roy's part. He would il at his brother's advice, and then most likely igest and follow it; but she gave Richard a little int once.

"Leave them alone; their happiness is still so we to them," pleaded the soft-hearted woman. You can't expect Rex to look beyond the present t, now Polly is with him—when he is stronger he will settle down to work." And though chard shook his head a little incredulously, he isely held his peace.

But he would have bristled over with horror and

amazement if he had known half of the extravaga nt day-dreams and plans which Roy was for ever pouring into Aunt Milly's ear. Roy, who was impetuous in his love-making as in other things, could not be made to understand that there was any necessity for waiting; that Polly should be dure north while he was due south was clearly absurdity to his mind, and he would argue the point until Mildred was fairly bewildered.

"Rex, my dear boy, do be reasonable," showed pleaded once; "what would Richard say if he heard you? You must give up this daft scheme of yours; it is contrary to all common senses. Why, you have never earned fifty pounds by your painting yet."

"Excuse me, Aunt Milly, but it is so difficult to make women see anything in a business point of view," replied the invalid, somewhat loftily. "Polly understands me, of course, but she is an exception to the general rule. I defy any one—even you, Aunt Milly—to beat Polly in common sense."

"He means, of course, if his picture be sold," returned Polly, sturdily, who feared nothing in the world but separation from Roy. She was ready to eat bread and cheese cheerfully all her life, she thought. Both young people were in the hazy

r

osphere of all youthful lovers, when a crust PP ears a picturesque and highly desirable food, and rent and taxes and all such contemptible items delusions of the evil one, fostered in the brain careful parents.

- Sood price. He will then be sure of work fromdealers."
- There, I told you so," repeated Roy, triumphily, "as though Polly did not know the ups and wns of an artist's life better than you, or even Aunt Milly. It is not as though we expected impagne and silk dresses, and all sorts of increasary luxuries."
- "Or velvet coats," quietly added Mildred, and Roy looked a little crestfallen.
- "Aunt Milly, how can you be so unkind, so disagreeable?" cried Polly, with a little burst of indignation. "I shall wear print dresses or cheap muslin. There was such a pretty one at sevenpence-halfpenny the yard, at Oliver's; but of course Rex must have his velvet coat, it looks so well on an artist, and suits him so. I would not have Roy look shabby and out of elbows, like Dad Fabian, for the world."

"You would look very pretty in a print dress,

Polly, I don't doubt," returned Roy, a little sad It "but Aunt Milly is right, and it would not match my velvet coat. We must be consistent, as Richard says."

"French muslin is not so very dear, and it wear splendidly," returned Polly, in the tone of one elated by a new discovery, "and with a fresh ribbon now and then I shall look as well as I do now. You don't suppose I mean to be a slattern if we are ever so poor. But you shall have your velvet coat, if I have to pawn the watch Dr. Heriot gave me." And Roy's answer was not meant for Mildred to hear.

Mildred felt as though she were turning the page of some story-book as she listened to their talk. How charmingly unreal it all sounded; how splendidly coloured with youth and happiness. After all, they were not ambitious. The rooms at the little cottage at Frognal bounded all their desires. The studio with the cross light and faded drapery, the worn couch and little square piano, was to be their living room. Polly was to work and sing, while Roy painted. Dull! how could they be dull when they had each other? Polly would go to market, and prepare dainty little dishes out of nothing; she could train flowers round the

the empty coop by the arbour. With plenty of sees and fresh vegetables, their expenses would be fifting. Dugald had taught Rex to make potato oup and herring salad. Why, he and Dugald had pent he did not know how little a week, and of curse his father would help him. Polly was enniless and an orphan, and it was his duty to ork for her as well as for himself.

Mildred wondered what Dr. Heriot would think f the young people's proposition. As Polly was nder age, he had a voice in the matter, but she eld her peace on this subject. After all, it was nly a day-dream—a very pleasant picture, She was conscious of a vague feeling of regret that hings could not be as they planned. Roy was soyish and impulsive, but Polly might be trusted, he thought. Every now and then there was a ittle spirt of shrewdness and humour in the girl's words that bubbled to the surface.

"Roy will always be wanting to buy new books and new music, but I shall punish him by liking the old ones best," she said, with a laugh. "And no more boxes of cigarettes, or bottles of lavenderwater; and oh, Rex, you know your extravagance in gloves."

"I shall only wear them on Sundays," repl Roy, virtuously, "and I shall smoke pipes—honest meerschaum after all is more enjoyable, in the evenings we will take long walks towa Hendon or Barnet. Polly is a famous walker, on fine Sundays we will go to Westminster Abl or St. Paul's, or some of the grand old churches; one can hear fine music at the Fou ling, and at St. Andrew's, Wells Street. Podoes not know half the delights of living London."

"She will know it in good time," retur Mildred, softly. She would not take upon her to damp their expectations; in a little while t would learn to be reasonable. In the mean w she indulged in the petting that was with her a second nature.

But it was a relief when her brother and O arrived; she had no idea how much she had mis them, until she caught sight of her brother's boiligure and grey head, and Olive's grave, sal face beside it.

It was an exciting evening. Mr. Lambert overjoyed at seeing his son again, though m shocked at the still visible evidences of past suf ing. Polly was warmly welcomed with a father

blessing, and he was so much occupied with the young pair, that Mildred was at liberty to devote herself to Olive.

She followed her into her room ostensibly to assist in unpacking, but they soon fell into one of their old talks.

"Dear Olive," she said, kissing her, "you don't know how good it is to see you again. I never believed I could miss you so much."

"You have not missed me half so much as I have you," returned Olive, blushing with surprised pleasure. "I always feel so lost without you, Aunt Milly. When I wanted you very badly—more than usual, I mean—I used to go into your room and think over all the comforting talks we have had together, and then try and fancy what you would tell me to do in such and such cases."

"Dear child, that was drawing from a very shallow well. I remember I told you to fold up all your perplexities in your letters and I would try and unravel them for you; but I see you were afraid of troubling me."

"That was one reason, certainly; but I had mother as well. I could not forget what you told conce about the bracing effects of self-decision in most circumstances, and how you once laughingly

compared me to Mr. Ready-to-Halt, and adviseme to throw away my crutches."

"In other words, solving your own difficulties; certainly I meant what I said. Grown-up persons are so fond of thinking for young people, instead of training them to think for themselves, and then they are surprised that the brain struggles so slowly from the swaddling-bands that they themselves have wrapped round them."

"It was easier than I thought," returned Olive, slowly; "at first I tormented myself in my old way, and was tempted to renew my arguments about conflicting duties, till I remembered there must be a right and wrong in everything, or at least by comparison a better way."

"Why, you have grown quite a philosopher, Olive; I shall be proud of my pupil," and Mildred looked affectionately at her niece. What a noble-looking woman Olive would be, she thought. True, the face was colourless, and the features far too strongly marked for beauty, but the mild, dark eyes and shadowy hair redeemed it from plainness, and the speaking, yet subdued, intelligence that lingered behind the hesitating speech, produced a pleasing impression; yet Mildred, who knew the face so well, fancied a shadow of past or present

adness tinged the even gravity that was its revailing expression.

Olive's thoughts unfolded slowly like flowers, ley always needed the sunshine of sympathy; keen breath, the light mockery of incredulity, illed them on the spot. Now of her own accord to began to speak of the young lovers.

"How happy dear Roy looks, Polly is just uited for him. Do you know, Aunt Milly, I had sort of presentiment of this, it always seemed to e that she and Dr. Heriot were making believe like each other."

"I think Dr. Heriot was tolerably in earnest, live."

"Of course he meant to be; but I always ought there was too much benevolence for the sht thing; and as for Polly—oh, it was easy to that she only tried to be in love—it quite tired out, the trying I mean, and made her cross and pettish with us sometimes."

"I never gave you credit for so much observation."

"I dare say not," returned Olive, simply, "only the wakes up sometimes to find things are turning that all wrong. Do you know they puzzled me toght—Rex and Polly, I mean. I expected to the so different, and they are just the same."

"An

IIg

ake

N WE

thi

·He

-12 C

Tab.

"Bu Ch

> ane Tabo

"How do you mean? I should think it would be difficult to find two happier creatures anywhere; they behave as most young people do under the circumstances, are never willingly out of each other's sight, and talk plenty of nonsense."

"That is just what I cannot make out, it seems such a solemn and beautiful thing to me, that I cannot understand treating it in any other way. Why, they were making believe to quarrel just now, and Polly was actually pouting."

Mildred with difficulty refrained from a smile.

"They do that just for the pleasure of making it up again. If you could see them this moment you would find them like a pair of cooing doves; it will be 'Poor Rex!' and 'Dear Rex!' all the evening. There is no doubt of his affection for her, Olive; it nearly cost his life."

"That is only an additional reason for treating it seriously. If any one cared for me in that way, went on Olive, blushing slightly over her words "not that I could believe such a thing possible, interrupting herself.

"Why not, you very wise woman?" asked he aunt, amused by this voluntary confession. Never before had Olive touched on this threadbare and oft-maligned subject of love.

"Aunt Milly, as though you could speak of such thing as probable!" returned Olive, with a slight buke in her voice. "Putting aside plainness, id want of attraction, and that sort of thing, do in think any man would find me a helpmeet?"

"He must be the right sort of man, of course,"
"a direct opposite to you in everything," she
as about to add, but checked herself.

"But if the right sort is not to be found, Aunt lilly?" with a touch of quaintness that at times used her gravity with humour. "Didn't you now 'Much-Afraid' was an old maid?"

"We must get rid of all these old names, Olive; ey will not fit now."

"All the same, of course I know these things e not possible with me. Imagine being a wet anket to a man all his life! But what I was ing to say was, that if any one cared for me as ex does for Polly, I should think it the next lemn thing to death—quite as beautiful and not terrible. Fancy," warming with the visionary bject, "just fancy, Aunt Milly, being burthened th the whole happiness and well-being of another never to think alone again!"

"Dear Olive, you cannot expect all lovers to dulge in these metaphysics, commonplace minds

remain commonplace, the Divinities are silent within them."

"I think this is why I dislike the subject into duced into general conversation," replied Olive, pondering heavily over her words, "people are for ever dragging it in. So-and-so is to be married next week, and then a long description of the bride's trousseau and the bridesmaids' dresses; the idea is as paganish as the undertaker's plume of feathers and mutes at a funeral."

"I agree with you there; people almost always treat the subject coarsely, or in a matter-of-fact way. A wedding-show is a very pretty thing to outsiders but, like you, Olive, I have often marvelled at the absence of all solemnity."

"I suppose it jars upon me more than on otherbecause I dislike talking on what interests me most." I think sacred things should be treated sacredly. But how I am wandering on, and there was somuch I wanted to tell you!"

"Never mind, I will hear it all to-morrow.
must not let you fatigue yourself after such =
journey. Now I will finish the unpacking whilyou sit and rest yourself."

Olive was too docile and too really weary to resis

She sat silently watching Mildred's brisk move

ents, till the puzzled look in the dark eyes passed ito drowsiness.

"The Eternal voice," she murmured, as she laid er head on the pillow, and Mildred bade her goodight, "it seems to lull one into rest though, a tired hild would sleep without rocking listening to it;" nd so the slow, majestic washing of the waves ore her into dreamland.

Mildred did not find an opportunity of resuming to conversation until the following afternoon, when ichard had planned a walk to Fairlight Glen, in hich Polly reluctantly joined, but Mildred, who new Roy and his father had much to say to the other, had insisted on not leaving her hind.

She was punished by having a very silent comnion all the way, as Richard had carried off live; but by and by Polly's conscience pricked r for ill-humour and selfishness, and when they ached the Glen, her hand stole into Mildred's uff with a penitent squeeze, and her spirits rising th the exhibitantion of the long walk, she darted in pursuit of Olive and brought her back, while offered herself in her place to Richard.

"You have monopolised her all the way, and I now she is dying for a talk with Aunt Milly; you

nuati

nter.

rne

ر لنڌ

ithe

BiE.

ie.

must put up with me instead," said the little lady, defiantly.

Mildred and Olive meanwhile seated themselves on one of the benches overlooking the Glen; the spot was sheltered, and the air mild and soft for January; there were patches of cloudy blue to be seen through the leafless trees, which looked like a procession of grey, hoary skeletons in the hary light.

"Woods have a beauty of their own in winter," observed Mildred, as she noticed Olive's satisfied glance round her. Visible beauty always rested her, Olive often said.

"Its attraction is the attraction of death," returned her companion, thoughtfully. "Look these old giants waiting for their resurrection, to be 'clothed upon,' that is just the expression."

Aunt Milly."

"With their dead hopes at their feet; you are teaching me to be poetical, Olive. Don't you love the feel of those crisp yellow leaves crunching softly under one's feet? I think a leaf-race in a high wind is one of the most delicious things in nature."

"Ask Cardie what he thinks of that."

"Cardie would say we are talking highflown nonsense. I can never make him share my

niration for that soft grey light one sees in iter. I remember we were walking over Hillstom one lovely February afternoon, the shades the landscape were utterly indescribable, half it, and yet so softly blended, the grey tone the buildings was absolutely warm—that inse greyness—and all I could get him to say, that Kirkby Stephen was a very ugly n."

Roy is more sympathetic about colours; Cardie s strong contrasts, decided sunsets, better than glimmering of moonlight nights; he can be susiastic enough over some things. I have heard talk beautifully to Ethel."

By the bye, you have told me nothing of her. he still away?"

Yes, but they are expecting her back this ak or next. It seems such a pity Kirkleatham to often empty. Mrs. Delaware says it is quite less to the place."

'It is certainly very unsatisfactory; but now out your work, Olive; how does it progress?"

Olive hesitated. "I will talk to you about that sently; there is something else that may interest 1 to hear. Do you know Mr. Marsden is nking of leaving us?"

Mildred uttered an expression of surprise and disappointment. "Oh, I hope it is not true!" she reiterated, in a regretful tone.

"You say that because you do not know" returned Olive, with her wonted soft seriousness "he has told me everything. Only think, Au Milly, he asked my advice, and really seemed think I could help him to a decision. Fancy helping any one to decide a difficult question with a smile that seemed to cover deeper feelings.

"Why not? it only means that he has recognised your earnestness and thorough honesty of purpose. There is nothing like honesty to inspire confidence, Olive. I am sure you would help him to a very wise decision."

"I think he had already decided for himself before he came to me," returned the girl, meditatively; "one can always tell when a man has made up his mind to do a thing. You see he has always felt an inclination for missionary work, and this really seems a direct call."

"You forget you have not enlightened me on the subject," hinted Mildred, gently.

"How stupid of me, but I will begin from the beginning. Mr. Marsden told me one morning that he had had letters from his uncle, Archdeacon

Champneys, one of the most energetic workers in the Bloemfontain Mission. You have read all about it, Aunt Milly, in the quarterly papers. Don't you recollect how interested we all were about it?"

"Yes, I remember. Richard seemed quite enthusiastic about it."

"Well, the Archdeacon wrote that they were in pressing need of clergy. Look, I have the letter with me. Mr. Marsden said I might show it to you. He has marked the passage that has so impressed him."

"I am at my wits' end to know how to induce clergy to come out. Do you know of any priest who would come to our help! If you do, for God's sake use your influence to induce him to come.

"We want help for the Diamond Fields; Theological College Brotherhood at Middleport; Itinerating work; Settled Parochial work at Philippolis and elsewhere.

"We want men with strong hearts and active, healthy frames—men with the true missionary spirit—with fixedness of will and undaunted purpose, ready to battle against obstacles, and to endure peacefully the 'many petty, prosaic, commonplace, and harassing trials' that beset a new work. If you know such an one, bid him God-speed, and help him to find his way to us. I promise you we shall see his face as the 'face of an angel.'"

"A pressing appeal," sighed Mildred; she experienced a vague regret she hardly understood.

"Mr. Marsden felt it to be such. Oh, I wish

you had heard him talk. He said, as a boy he had always felt a drawing to this sort of work; that with his health and strength and superabundant energies he was fitter for the rough life of the colonies than for the secondary and supplementary life of an ordinary English curate. 'Give me plenty of space and I could do the work of three men,' and as he said it he stretched out his arms. You know his way, Aunt Milly, that makes one feel how big and powerful he is."

"He may be right, but how we shall miss him," returned Mildred, who had a thorough respect and liking for big, clumsy Hugh.

"Not more than he will miss us, he says. He will have it we have done him so much good; but there is one thing he feels, that Richard will soon be able to take his place. In any case he will not go until the autumn, not then if his mother be still alive."

"Is he still so hopeless about her condition?"

"How can he be otherwise, Aunt Milly, when the doctor tells him it is only a question of time. Did you hear that he has resigned all share in the little legacy that has lately come to them? He says it will make them so comfortable that they will not need to keep their little school any longer; is it not good of him?" went on Olive, warming into enthusiasm.

"I think he has done the right thing, just what I should have expected him to do. And so you have strengthened him in his decision, Olive?"

"Can there be any life so noble, so self-denying? I told him once that I envied him, and he looked so pleased, and then the tears came into his eyes, and he seemed as though he wanted to say something, but checked himself. Do you know," drooping her head and speaking in a deprecating tone, "that hearing him talk like this made me feel dissatisfied with myself and—and my work?"

"Poor little nightingale! you would rather be a working bee," observed Mildred, smiling. This was the meaning then of the shadowed brightness she had noticed last night.

"No, but somehow I could not help feeling his work was more real. The very self-sacrifice it involves sets it apart in a higher place, and then the direct blessing, Aunt Milly," with an effort. "What good does my poetry do to any one but myself?"

"St. Paul speaks of the diversities of gifts," returned Mildred, soothingly. She saw that daily

contact with perfect health and intense vitality are usefulness had deadened the timid and imaginative forces that worked beneath the surface in the girl mind; a warped sense of duty or fear from the legions of her old enemies had beset her pleasure with sick loathing—for some reason or other Olive's creative work had lain idle.

"Do you recollect the talent laid up in the napkin, Olive?"

"But if it should not be a talent, rather a temptation," whispered the girl, under her breath. "No, I cannot believe it is that, after, all, Aunt Milly, only I have got weary about it. Have I not chosen the work I liked best—the easiest, the most attractive?"

"Do you think a repulsive service would please our beneficent Creator best?"

Olive was silent. Were the old shadows creeping round her again?

"Your work just now seems very small by the side of Mr. Marsden's. His vocation and consecration to a new work in some way, and by comparison, overshadows yours; perhaps, unconsciously, his words have left an unfavourable impression; you know how sensitive you are, Olive."

"He never imagined that they could influence me."

"No, he is the kindest-hearted being in the world, and would not willingly damp any one, but all the same he might unconsciously vaunt his work before your eyes; but before we decide on the reality or unreality of your talent, I want to recall something to your mind that this same good Bishop of Bloemfontain said in his paper on women's work. I remember how greatly I was struck with it. His exact words, as far as I can remember them, were—'that work—missionary work—demands fair health, unshattered nerves, and that general equableness of spirits which so largely depends upon the physical state. A morbid mind or conscience' (mark that, Olive) 'is unfit for the work.'"

"But, Aunt Milly," blushing slightly, "I never meant that I thought myself fit for mission work. You do not think that I would ever leave papa?"

"No, but a certain largeness of view may help us to exorcise the uneasy demon that is harassing you. You may not have Bloemfontain in your thoughts, but you may be trying to work yourself into the belief that God may be better pleased if you immolate your favourite and peculiar talent and devote yourself to some repugnant ministry of good works where you would probably do more hamathan good."

"I confess some such thoughts as these have been troubling me."

"I read them in your eyes. So genius is given for no purpose but to be thrown aside like a uselestoy. What a degradation of a sacred thing! How could you be such a traitor to your own orders. Olive? This vacillating mood of yours makes make

"I wish you would scold me out of it, Aun\_\_\_\_t Milly; you are doing me good already. Any kin\_\_\_\_d of doubt makes me positively unhappy, and I reall\_\_\_\_\_y did begin to believe that I had mistaken m\_\_\_\_\_\_y vocation."

"Olive will always be Olive as long as she lives, returned Mildred, in a grieved tone, but as the girshrank back somewhat pained, she hastened to say "I think doubtfulness—the inward trembling of the fibres of hope and fear—are your peculiar temptation. How would you repel any evil suggestion that came to you, Olive—any unmistakably bad thought I mean?"

"I would try and shut my mind to it, not look at it," replied Olive, warmly.

"Repel it with disdain. Well, I think I should all with your doubts in the same way; if they ill not yield after a good stand-up fight, entrench urself in your garrison and shut the door on me. Every work of God is good, is it not?"
"The Bible says so."

"Then yours must be good, since He has given
the power and delight in putting together
utiful thoughts for the pleasure and, I trust, the
lefit of His creatures, and especially as you have
licated it to His service. What if after all you
right?" she continued, presently, "and if it be
the very highest work, can you not be among
le little ones' that do His will? Will not this
esent duty and care for your father and the small
ly charities that lie on your threshold suffice
til a more direct call be given to you? It may
noe, I do not say it will not, Olive; but I am
re that the present work is your duty now."

"You have lifted a burthen off me," returned ive, gratefully, and there was that in the clear ining of her eyes that echoed the truth of her ords: "it was not that I loved my work less, but at I tried not to love it. I like what you said, unt Milly, about being one of 'His little ones.'"

## CHAPTER IX.

"YES."

"Some one came and rested there beside me,
Speaking words I never thought would bless
Such a loveless life. I longed to hide me,
Feasting lonely on my happiness.
But the voice I heard
Pleaded for a word,
Till I gave my whispered answer, 'Yes!'

Yes, that little word, so calmly spoken,
Changed all life for me—my own—my own!
All the cold grey spell I saw unbroken,
All the twilight days seemed past and gone.
And how warm and bright,
In the ruddy light,
Pleasant June days of the future shone!"

Helen Marion Burnside.

It was with mingled feelings of pleasure and regret that Mildred saw the grey walls of the vicarage again. It was harder than she imagined to say good-bye to Roy, knowing that she would not see him again until the summer, but her position as nurse had long become a sinecure; the place was now rightfully usurped by his young betrothed. The

i-breezes had already proved so beneficial to his alth, that it was judged that he might safely be mitted at the end of another month to resume rk in the old studio, by which time idleness and e-making might be expected to lose their novelty, I Mildred hoped that Polly would settle down pily with the others, when her good sense uld be convinced that an early marriage would prejudicial to Roy's interest.

it was very strange to find Chriss the only coming home presence—Chriss in office was a hly ludicrous idea. She had taken advantage her three days' housekeeping to introduce king reforms in the ménage, against which Nan l stormed and threatened in vain, the housemaid xed harassed, and the parlourmaid on the eve of ing warning; the little figure with the touzled Is and holland apron, and rattling keys, depending n the steel chatelaine, looked oddly picturesque the house porch as the travellers drove up. en Mr. Marsden came in after even-song to aire after their well-being, and Richard insisted his remaining to tea, Chriss looked mightily ghty and put on her eyeglasses, and presided he head of the table in a majestic way that tried aunt's gravity. "The big young man," as she VOL. III.

still phrased Hugh Marsden, was never likely to be a favourite with Chriss; but she thawed presently under Mildred's genial influence; no one knew so well how to bend the prickles, and draw out the wholesome sweetness that lay behind. By the end of the third cup, Chriss was able to remember perfectly that Mr. Marsden did not take sugar, and could pass his cup without a glacial stare or a tendency to imitate the swelling and ruffling out of a dignified robin.

At the end of the evening, Mildred, who had by that time grown a little weary and silent, heard the footstep in the lobby for which she had been unconsciously listening for the last two hours.

"Here comes Dr. John at last," observed Richard, in strange echo of her thought. "I expected he would have met us at the station, but I suppose he was called away as usual."

Dr. Heriot gave no clue to his absence. He shook hands very quietly with Mildred, and hoped that she was not tired, and then turned to Richard for news of the invalid; and when that topic was exhausted, seemed disposed to relapse into a brown study, from which Mildred curiously did not care to wake him.

She was quite content to see him sitting there in

s old place, playing absently with her paper-knife, id dropping a word here and there, but oftener stening to the young men's conversation. Hugh as eagerly discussing the Bloemfontain question. e and Richard had been warmly debating the bject for the last hour. Richard was sympathetic, it he had a notion his friend was throwing himself ray.

"We don't want to lose such men as you out of igland, Marsden, that's the fact. I have always ked upon; you as just the sort of hard worker a parish at the East end of London. Look at r city Arabs; it strikes me there is room for ssionary work there—not but what South Africa a demand on us too."

The to be said," replied Hugh, striking himself repetically on his broad chest, and speaking in his st powerful bass. "One has something to give, of course; all colonial careers involve a degree thardship and self-sacrifice; not that I agree with to the right decision. Because we may content to the right decision. Because we may content to undertake a pilgrimage, it does follow we need have pebbles or peas in our ses, or that the stoniest road is the most direct."

- "Of course not."
- "We don't need these by laws to guide us; there's plenty of hardship everywhere, and I hope, no amount would frighten me from any work I undertake conscientiously. It may be pleasanter to remain in England. I am rather of your opinion myself; but, all the same, when a man feels he has a call——"

"I should be the last to dissuade him from it; I only want you to look at the case in all its bearing. I believe after all you are right, and that I should do the same in your place."

"One ought never to decide too hastily for fear of regretting it afterwards," put in Dr. Heriot. Mildred gave him a half-veiled glance. Why was he so quiet and abstracted, she wondered? Another time he would have entered with animation into the subject, but now some grave thought sealed his lips. Could it be that Polly's decision had had more effect on him than he had chosen to avow; that he felt lonely and out of spirits? She watched timidly for some opportunity of testing her fears; she was almost sure that he was dull or troubled about something.

"Some people are so afraid of deciding wrong

that they seldom arrive at any decision at all," returned Hugh, with one of his great laughs.

"All the same, over-haste brings early repentance," returned Dr. Heriot, a little bitterly, as he rose.

"Are you going?" asked Mildred, feeling disappointed by the shortness of his visit.

"I am poor company to-night," he returned, hastily. "I am in no mood for general talk. I dare say I shall see you some time to-morrow. By the bye, how is it Polly has never answered my last letter?"

"She has sent a hundred apologies. I assure you, she is thoroughly ashamed of herself; but Roy is such a tyrant, the child has not an hour to herself."

A smile broke over his face. "I suppose not; it must be very amusing to watch them. Roy runs a chance of being completely spoiled;" but this Mildred would not allow.

She went to bed feeling dissatisfied with herself for her dissatisfaction. After all, what did she expect? He had behaved just as any other man would have behaved in his position; he had been perfectly kind and friendly, had questioned her about her health, and had spoken of the length of her journey with a proper amount of sympathy. It must have been some fancy of hers that he had evaded her eyes. After all, what right had she to meddle with his moods, or to be uneasy because of his uneasiness? Was not this the future she had planned? a foretaste of the long evenings, when the grey-haired friend should quietly sit beside her, either speaking or silent, according to his will.

Mildred scolded herself into quietness before she slept. After all, there was comfort in the thought of seeing him the next day; but this hope was doomed. to be frustrated. Dr. Heriot did not make his appearance; he sent an excuse by Richard, whom he carried off with him to Nateby and Winton > an old college friend was coming to dine with him, and Richard and Hugh Marsden were invited to meet him. Mildred found her tête-à-tête evening with Chriss somewhat harassing, and would have gladly taken refuge in silence and a book, but Chriss had begged so hard to read a portion 🗪 the translation of a Greek play on which she was engaged that it was impossible to refuse, and noisy hour of declamation and uncertain utterance owing to the illegibility of the manuscript and the screeching remonstrances of Fritter-my-wig, whose

rightful rest was invaded, soon added the discomfort of a nervous headache to Mildred's other pains and penalties, and when Chriss, flushed and panting, had arrived at the last blotted page, she had hardly fortitude enough to give the work all the praise it merited. The quiet of her own room was blissful by comparison, though it brought with it a fresh impulse of tormenting thoughts. Why was it that, with all her strength of will, she had made so little progress; that the man was still so dangerously dear to her; that even without a single hope to feed her, he should still be the sum and substance of her thoughts; that all else should seem as nothing in comparison with his happiness and peace of mind?

That he was far from peace she knew; her first look at him had assured her of that. And the knowledge that it was so had wrought in her this strange restlessness. Would he ever bring himself to speak to her of this fresh blank in his existence? If it should be so, she would bid him go away for a little time; in some way his life was too monotonous for him; he must seek fresh interests for himself; the vicarage must no longer inclose his only friends. He had often spoken to her of his love for travel, and had more than once hinted

at a desire to revisit the Continent; why should she not persuade him that a holiday lay within the margin of his duty; she would willingly endure his absence, if he would only come back brighter and fresher for his work.

Fate had, however, decreed that Mildred's patience should be sorely tested, for though she looked eagerly for his coming all the next day, the opportunity for which she longed did not arrive. Dr. Heriot still held aloof, and the word in season could not be spoken. The following day was Sunday, but even then things were hardly more satisfactory, a brief hand-shake in the porch after evening service, and an inquiry after Roy, was all that passed between them.

"He is beyond any poor comfort that I can give him," thought Mildred, sorrowfully, as she groped her way through the dark churchyard paths. "He looks worn and harassed, but he means to keep his trouble to himself. I will try to put it all out of my head; it ought to be nothing to me what he feels or suffers," and she lay awake all night trying to put this prudent resolve into execution.

The next afternoon she walked over to Nateby to look up some of her old Sunday scholars. It was a mild, wintry afternoon; a grey haziness pervaded everything. As she passed the bridge she lingered for a moment to look down below on the spot which was now so sacred to her; the sight of the rocks and foaming water made her cover her face with a mute thanksgiving. Imagination could not fail to reproduce the scene. Again the felt herself crashing amongst the cruel stones, and saw the black, sullen waters below her. "Oh, why was I saved? to what end—to what purpose?" she gasped, and then added penitently, "Surely not to be discontented, and indulge in impossible fancies, but to devote a rescued life to the good of others."

Mildred was so occupied with these painful reflections that she did not hear carriage-wheels passing in the road below the bridge, and was unaware that Dr. Heriot had descended and thrown the reins to a passing lad, and was now making his way towards her.

His voice in her ear drove the blood to her heart with the sudden start of surprise and pleasure.

"We always seem fated to meet in this place," he laughed, feigning not to notice her embarrassment, but embarrassed himself by it. "Coop Kernan Hole must have a secret attraction for both of us. I find myself always driving slowly over

the bridge, as though I were following a possible friend's funeral."

"As you might have done," she returned, with a grateful glance that completed her sentence.

"Shall we go down and look at it more closely?"
he asked, after a moment's silence, during which he had revolved some thought in his mind. "In have an odd notion that seeing it again may lay the ghost of an uneasy dream that always haunts me. After a harder day's work than usual, this scene is sure to recur to me at night; sometimes I have to leave you there, you have floated so far out of my reach," with a meaning movement of his hand. Mildred shuddered.

"Shall we come—that is—if you do not much dislike the idea," and as Mildred saw no reason for refusing, she overcame her feelings of reluctance, and followed him through the little gate, and down the steep steps beyond which lay the uneven masses of grey brockram. There he waited for her with outstretched hand.

"You need not think that I shall trust you to your own care again," he said, with rather a whimsical smile, but as he felt the trembling that ran through hers, it vanished, and he became unusually grave. In another moment he checked her abruptly,

and almost peremptorily. "We will not go any farther; your hand is not steady enough, you are nervous." Mildred in vain assured him to the contrary; he insisted that she should sit down for a few moments, and, in spite of her protestations, took off his great-coat and spread it on the rock. "I am warm, far too warm," he asserted, when he saw her looks of uneasiness. "This spot is so sheltered;" and he stood by her and lifted his hat, as though the cool air refreshed him.

"Do you remember our conversation on the other side of the bridge?" he asked presently, turning to her. Mildred flushed with sudden pain—too well she remembered it—and the long night of struggle and well nigh despair that had followed it.

"I wonder what you thought of me; you were very quiet, very sweet-voiced in your sympathy; but I fancied your eyes had a distrustful gleam in them; they seemed to doubt the wisdom of my choice. Mildred," with a quick touch of passion in his voice such as she had never heard before, "what a fool you must have thought me!"

"Dr. Heriot, how can you say such things?" but her heart beat faster; he had called her Mildred again.

"Because I must and will say them. A man

must call himself names when he has made such a pitiful thing of life. Look at my marrying Margaret—a mistake from beginning to end; and yet I must needs compass a second piece of folly."

"There, I think you are too hard on yourself."

"What right had I at my age, or rather with my experience and knowledge of myself, to think I could make a young girl happy, knowing, as I ought to have known, that her endearing ways could not win her an entrance into the deepest part of my nature—that would have been closed for ever," speaking in a suppressed voice.

"It was a mistake for which no one could blame you, Polly least of all," she returned, eager to soothe this wounded susceptibility.

"Dear Polly, it was her little fingers that set me free—that set both of us free. Coop Kernan Hole would have taught me its lesson too late but for her."

"What do you mean?" asked Mildred, startled, and trying to get a glimpse of his face; but he had turned it from her, possibly the uncontrolled muscles and the flash of the eye might have warned her without a word.

"What has it taught you?" she repeated, feeling

"YES." 221

she must get to the bottom of this mystery, whatever it might cost her.

"That it was not Polly that I loved," he returned, in a suppressed voice, "but another whom I might have lost—whom Coop Kernan Hole might have snatched from me. Did you know this, Mildred?"

"No," she faltered. "I do not believe it now," she might have added if breath had not failed her. In her exceeding astonishment, to think such words had blessed her ear, it was impossible—oh, it was impossible—she must hear more.

"I am doubly thankful to it," he repeated, stooping over her as she sat, that the fall might not drown his voice; "its dark waters are henceforth glorified to me. Never till that day did I know what you were to me; what a blank my life would be to me without you. It has come to this—that I cannot live without you, Mildred—that you are to me what no other woman, not even Margaret, not even my poor wife, has been to me."

She buried her face in her trembling hands. Not even to him could she speak, until the pent-up feelings in her heart had resolved themselves into an inward cry, "My God, for this—for these words—I thank Thee!"

He watched her anxiously, as though in doubt

of her emotion. Love was making him timid. After all, could he have misunderstood her words? "Do not speak to me yet, I do not ask it; I do not expect it," he said, touching her hand to make her look at him. "You shall give me your answer when you like—to-morrow—a week hence—you shall have time to think of it. By and by I must know what you have for me in return, and whether my blindness and mistake have alienated you, but I will not ask it now." He moved from her a few steps, and came hurriedly back; but Mildred, still pale from uncontrollable feeling, would not raise her eyes. "I may be wrong in thinking you cared for me a little. Do you remember what you said? 'John, save me!' Mildred, I do not deserve it. I have brought it all on myself, and I will try and be patient; but when you can come to me and say, 'John, I love you; I will be your wife,' you will remove a mountain-load of doubt and uncertainty. Ah, Mildred, Mildred, will you ever be able to say His emotion, his sensitive doubts had overmastered him; he was as deadly pale as the woman Again he turned away, but this time he wooed. she stopped him.

"Why need you wait? you must know I---,"

"YES." 223

out here the soft voice wavered and broke down; but he had heard enough.

- "What must I know?—that you love me?"
- "Yes," was all her answer; but she raised her eyes and looked at him, and he knew then that the great loneliness of his life was gone for ever.

And Mildred, what were her thoughts as she sat with her lover beside her, looking down at the sunless pool before them? here, where she had grappled with death, the crowning glory of her life was given to her, the grey colourless hues had faded out of existence, the happiness for which she had not dared to ask, which the humble creature had not whispered even in her prayers, had come to her, steeping her soul with wondrous content and gratitude.

And out of her happiness came a great calm. For a little while neither of them spoke much, but the full understanding of that sacred silence lay like a pure veil between them. They were neither young, both had known the mystery of suffering—the man held in his heart a dreary past, and Mildred's early life had been passed in patient waiting; but what exuberance of youthful joy could equal the quietude of their entire satisfaction?

"Mildred, it seems to me that I must have loved you unconsciously through it all," he said, presently, when their stillness had spent itself; "somehow you always rested me. It had grown a necessity with me to come and tell you my troubles; the very sound of your voice soothed me."

One of her beautiful smiles answered him. She knew he was right, and she had been more to him than he had guessed. Had not this consciousnes added the bitterest ingredient to her misery, the knowledge that he was deceiving himself, that no one could give him what was in her power to give

"But I never thought it possible until lately that you could care enough for me," he continued; "you seemed so calm, so beyond this sort of earthly passion. Ah, Mildred," half-gravely, half-caressingly, "how could you mislead me so? All my efforts to break down that quiet reserve seemed in vain."

"I thought it right; how could I guess it would ever come to this?" she answered, blushing. "I can hardly believe it now;" but the answer to this was so full and satisfactory that Mildred's last lingering doubt was dispelled for ever.

It was late in the afternoon when they parted at the vicarage gate; the dark figure in the wintry 1 escaped their observation in the twilight, 30 the last good-bye fell on Ethel Trelawny's ished ear.

It is not good-bye after all, Mildred; I shall ou again this evening," in Dr. Heriot's voice; e care of yourself, my dearest, until then; " and ong hand-clasp that followed his words spoke nes.

hen Mildred entered the drawing-room she a little start at the sight of Ethel. The girl out her hand to her with a strange smile.

Mildred, I was there and heard it. What he d you, I mean. Darling—darling, I am so," breaking off with a half-sob and suddenly ng her in her arms.

or a moment Mildred seemed embarrassed.

Dear Ethel, what do you mean? what could have heard?"

That he called you by your name. I heard roice; it was quite enough; it told me every, and then I closed the door. Oh, Mildred! hink he has come to an end of his blindness that he loves you at last."

Yes; does it not seem wonderful?" returned lred, simply. Her fair face was still a little led, her eyes were soft and radiant, in her vol. III.

53

happiness she looked almost lovely. Ethel knelt down beside her in a little effusion of girlish worship and sympathy.

"Did he tell you how beautiful you are, Mildred? No, you shall let me talk what nonsense I like tonight. I do not know when I have felt so happy. Does Richard know?"

"No one knows."

"Am I the first to wish you joy then, Mildred? I never was so glad about anything before. I could sing aloud in my gladness all the way from here to Kirkleatham."

"Dear Ethel, this is so like you."

"To think of the misery of mind you have both caused me, and now that it has come all right at last. Is he very penitent, Mildred?"

"He is very happy," she replied, smiling over the girl's enthusiasm.

"How sweetly calm you look. I should not feel so in your place. I should be pining for my lost liberty, I verily believe. How long have you understood each other? Ever since Roy and Polly have come to their senses?"

"No, indeed; only this afternoon."

"Only this afternoon?" incredulously.

"Yes; but it seems ages ago already. Ethel,

ou must not mind if I cannot talk much about his; it is all so new, you see."

"Ah, I understand."

"I knew how pleased you would be, you always appreciated him so; at one time I could have sooner believed you the object of his choice; till you assured me otherwise," smoothing the wavy ripples of hair over Ethel's white forehead.

"Women do not often marry their heroes; Dr. Heriot was my hero," laughed the girl. "I chose you for him the first day I saw you, when you came to meet me, looking so graceful in your deep mourning; your face and mild eyes haunted me, Mildred. I believe I fell in love with you then."

"Hush, here comes Richard," interrupted Mildred softly, and Ethel instantly became grave and rose to her feet.

But for once he hardly seemed to see her.

"Aunt Milly, my dear Aunt Milly," he exclaimed, with unusual warmth, "do you know what a little bird has told me?" he whispered, stooping his handsome head to kiss her.

"Oh, Cardie! do you know already? Have you met him?"

"Yes, and he will be here presently. Aunt Milly, I don't know what we are to do without

you, but all the same Dr. John shall have you. He is the only man who is worthy of Aunt Milly."

"There, that will do, you have not spoken to Ethel yet."

Oh, how Mildred longed to be alone with her thoughts, and yet the sound of her lover's praises were very sweet to her; he was Richard's hem as well as Ethel's, she knew, but with Richard's entrance Ethel seemed to think she must be going.

"It is so late now, but I will come again tomorrow;" and then as Mildred bade her goodnight she said another word or two of her exceeding gladness.

She would fain have declined Richard's escort, but he offered her no excuse. She found him waiting for her at the gate, and knew him too well to hope for her own way in this. She could only be on her guard and avoid any dangerous subject.

"You will all miss her dreadfully," she said, as they crossed the market-place in full view of Dr. Heriot's house. "I don't think any of you can estimate the blank her absence will leave at the vicarage."

"I can for one," he replied, gravely. "Do you think I can easily forget what she has done for us

since our mother died? But we shall not lose her —not entirely, I mean."

"No, indeed."

"Humanly speaking I think their chances of happiness are greater than that of any one. I know that they are so admirably suited to each other. Aunt Milly will give him just the rest he needs."

"I should not be surprised if he will forget all his bitter past then. But, Richard, I want to speak to you; you have not seen my father lately?"

"Not for months," he replied, startled at the change in her tone; all at once it took a thin, harassed note.

"He has decided to stand for the Kendal election, though more than one of his best friends have prophesied a certain defeat. Richard, I cannot help telling you that I dread the result."

"You must try not to be uneasy," he returned, with that unconscious softening in his voice that made it almost caressing. "You must know by this time how useless it is to try to shake his purpose."

"Yes, I know that," she returned, dejectedly; but all the same I feel as though he were

contemplating suicide. He is throwing away time and money on a mere chimera, for they say the Radical member will be returned to a certainty. If he should be defeated —pausing in some emotion.

- "Oh, he must take his chance of that."
- "You do not know; it will break him down entirely. He has set his heart on this thing, and it will go badly with both of us if he be disappointed. Last night it was dreadful to hear him talk. More than once he said that failure would be social death to him. It breaks my heart to see him looking so ill and yet refusing any sympathy that one can offer him."
- "Yes, I understand; if I could only help you," he returned, in a suppressed voice.
- "No one can do that, it has to be borne," was the dreary answer; and just then the lodge gates of Kirkleatham came in sight.

## CHAPTER X.

## JOHN HERIOT'S WIFE.

"Whose sweet voice
Should be the sweetest music to his ear,
Awaking all the chords of harmony;
Whose eye should speak a language to his soul
More eloquent than all that Greece or Rome
Could boast of in its best and happiest days;
Whose smile should be his rich reward for toil;
Whose pure transparent cheek pressed to his
Would calm the fever of his troubled thoughts,
And woo his spirits to those fields Elysian,
The Paradise which strong affection guards."

Bethune.

And so when her youth was passed Mildred Lambert found the great happiness of her life, and prepared herself to be a noble helpment to the man to whom unconsciously she had long given her heart.

This time there were no grave looks, no dissentient voice questioning the wisdom of Dr. Heriot's choice; a sense of fitness seemed to satisfy the most fastidious taste; neither youth nor beauty were

imperative in such a case. Mildred's gentleness was the theme of every tongue. Her tender, old-fashioned ways were discovered now to be wonderfully attractive; a hundred instances of her goodness and unselfishness reached her lover's ears.

"Every one seems to have fallen in love with you, Mildred," he said to her one sweet spring evening when he had crossed the market-place for his accustomed evening visit. Mildred was alone as usual; the voices of the young people sounded from the terrace; Olive and Richard were talking together; Polly was leaning against the wall reading a letter from Roy; the evening sun streamed through the window on Mildred's soft brown hair and grey silk, on the great bowls of golden primroses, on the gay tints of the china, a little green world lay beyond the bay window; undulating waves of grass, a clear sparkle of water, dim blue mists and lines of shadowy hills.

Mildred lifted her quiet eyes; their smiling depths seemed to hold a question and reproof.

"Every one thinks it their duty to praise you to me," he continued, in the same amused tone; "they are determined to enlighten me about the goodness of my future wife. They do not believe now well I know that already," with a strange glistening in his eyes.

"Please do not talk so, John," she whispered.
"I should not like you to think too well of me, for ear I should ever disappoint you."

"Do you believe that would be possible?" he sked, reproachfully.

Then she gave him one of her lovely smiles.

"No, I do not," she returned, simply; "because, hough we love each other, we do not believe each ther perfect. You have often called me self-willed, ohn, and I dare say you are right."

He laughed a little at that; her quaint gentleess had often amused him; he knew he should lways hear the truth from her. She would tell im of her faults over and over again, and he would isten to them gravely and pretend to believe them ather than wound her exquisite susceptibility; but to himself he declared that she had no flaw, hat she was the dearest, the purest, a pearl among vomen. Mildred would have shrunk in positive pain and humility if she had known the extravagant tandard to which he had raised her.

Sometimes he would crave to know her opinion of him in return. Like many men, he was morbidly

sensitive on this point, and was inclined to take blame to himself where he did not deserve it, and she would point out his errors to him in the simplest way, and so that the most delicate self-consciousness could not have been hurt.

"What, all those faults, Mildred?" he would say, with a pretence at a sigh. "I thought love was blind."

"I could never be blind about anything that concerns you, John," she would return, in the sweetest voice possible; "our faults will only bind us all the closer to each other. Is not that what helpmeet means?" she went on, a soft gravity stealing over her words, "that I should try to help you in everything, even against yourself? I always see faults clearest in those I love best," she finished, somewhat shyly.

"The last is the saving clause," he replied, with a look that made her blush. "In this case I shall have no objection to be told of my wrong-doings every day of my life. What a blessing it is that you have common sense enough for both. I am obliged to believe what you tell me about yourself of course, and mean to act up to my part of our contract, but at present I am unable to perceive the most distant glimmer of a fault."

"John!"

"Seriously and really, Mildred, I believe you to be as near perfection as a living woman can be," and when Dr. Heriot spoke in this tone Mildred always gave up the argument with a sigh.

But with all her self-accusations Mildred promised to be a most submissive wife. Already she proved herself docile to her lover's slightest wish. She did not even remonstrate when Dr. Heriot pleaded with her brother and herself that an early day should be fixed for the marriage; for herself she could have wished a longer delay, but he was lonely and wanted her, and that was enough.

Perhaps the decision was a little difficult when she thought of Olive, but the time once fixed, there was no hesitation. She went about her preparations with a quiet precision that made Dr. Heriot smile to himself.

"One would think you are planning for someody else's wedding, not your own," he said once, when she came down to him with her face full of gentle bustle; "come and sit down a little; at least I have the right to take care of you now, you precious woman."

"Yes; but, John, I am so busy, I have to think for them all, you know; and Olive, poor girl, is so scared at the thought of her responsibilities, and Richard is so occupied he cannot spare me time for anything," for Richard, now in deacon's orders, was working up the parish under Hugh Marsden's supervision. Hugh had lost his mother, and had finally yielded his great heart and strength to the South African Mission.

- "But there is Polly?" observed Dr. Heriot.
- "Yes, there is Polly until Roy comes," she returned, with a smile. "She is my right hand at present, until he monopolises her; but one has to think for them all, and arrange things."
- "You shall have no one but yourself to consider by and by," was his lover-like reply.
- "Oh, John, I shall only have time then to think of you!" was her quiet answer.

And so one sweet June morning, when the swathes and lines of new-mown hay lay in the crofts round Kirkby Stephen, and while the little rush-bearers were weaving their crowns for St. Peter's Day, and the hedges were thick with the pink and pearly bloom of brier-roses, Mildred Heriot stood leaning on her husband's arm in the St. Stephen's porch.

Merrily the worn old bells were pealing out, the sunlight streamed across the market-place, the churchyard paths, and the paved lanes, and the windows of the houses abutting on the churchyard were crowded with sympathising faces.

Not young nor beautiful, save to those who loved her; yet as she stood there in her soft-eyed graciousness, many owned that they had never seen a sweeter-faced bride.

"My wife, is this an emblem of our future life?" whispered Dr. Heriot, as he led her proudly down the path, almost hidden by the roses her little scholars' hands had strewn; but Mildred's lip quivered, and the pressure of her hand on his arm only answered him.

"How had she deserved such happiness?" the humble soul was asking herself even at this supreme moment. Under her feet lay the fast-fading roses, but above and around spread the pure arc of central blue—the everlasting arms of a Father's providence about her everywhere. Before them was the grey old vicarage, now no longer her home, the soft violet hills circling round it; above it a heavy snow-white cloud drooped heavily, like a guardian angel in mid-air; roses, and sunlight, and God's heavenly blue.

"Oh, it is all so beautiful!—how is one to deserve such happiness?" she thought; and then

it came to her that this was a free gift, a loan, a talent that the Father had given to be used for the Master's service, and the slight trembling passed away, and the beautiful serene eyes raised themselves to her husband's face with the meek trustfulness of old.

Mildred was not too much engrossed even in her happiness to notice that Olive held somewhat aloof from her through the day. Now and then she caught a glimpse of a weary, abstracted face. Just as she had finished her preparations for departure, and the travelling carriage had driven into the courtyard, she sent Ethel and Polly down on some pretext, and went in search of her favourite.

She found her in the lobby, sitting on the low window-seat, looking absently at the scene below her. The courtyard of the vicarage looked gay enough; the horses were champing their bits, and stamping on the beck gravel; the narrow strip of daisy turf was crowded with moving figures; Polly, in her pretty bridesmaid's dress, was talking to Roy; Ethel stood near them, with Richard and Hugh Marsden; Dr. Heriot was in the porch in earnest conversation with Mr. Lambert. Beyond lay the quiet churchyard, shimmering in the sunlight; the white crosses gleamed here and

there; the garlands of sweet-smelling weeds still strewed the paths.

"Dear Olive, are you waiting for me? I wanted just to say a last word or two;" and Mildred sat down beside her in her rich dress, and took the girl's listless hand in hers. "Promise me, my child, that you will do the best for yourself and them."

"It will be a poor best after you, Aunt Milly," returned Olive, with a grateful glance at the dear face that had been her comfort so long. It touched her that even now she should be remembered; with an impulse that was rare with her she put her arms round Mildred, and laid her face on her shoulder. "Aunt Milly, I never knew till to-day what you were to me—to all of us."

"Am I not to be Aunt Milly always, then?" for there was something ineffably sad in the girl's voice.

"Yes, but we can no longer look to you for everything. We shall miss you out of our daily life. I do not mean to be selfish, Aunt Milly. I love to think of your happiness; but all the same I must feel as though something has passed out of my life."

"I understand, dear. You know I never think

you selfish, Olive. Now I want you to do something for me—a promise you must make me on my wedding-day."

A flickering smile crossed Olive's pale face. "It must not be a hard one, then."

"It is one you can easily keep, — promise me to try to bear your failures hopefully. You will have many; perhaps daily ones. I am leaving you heavy responsibilities, my poor child; but who knows? They may be blessings in disguise."

An incredulous sigh answered her.

"It will be your own fault if they do not prove so. When you fail, when things go wrong, think of your promise to me, and be patient with yourself. Say to yourself, 'It is only one of Olive's mistakes, and she will try to do better next time.' Do you understand me, my dear?"

"Yes, I will try, Aunt Milly."

"I am leaving you, my darling, with a confidence that nothing can shake. I do not fear your goodness to others, only to this weary self," with a light caressing touch on the girl's bowed head and shoulders. "Hitherto you have leaned on me; I have been your crutch, Olive. Now you will rely on yourself. You see I do not make myself miser-

ble about leaving you. I think all this is ordered or the best."

"Yes, I know. How dear of you to say all this! But I must not keep you. Hark, they are calling ou!"

Mildred rose with a blush; she knew the light rile step on the stairs. In another moment Dr. eriot's dark face appeared.

"They are waiting, Mildred; we have not a oment to lose. You must come, my dear wife!"

"One moment, John;" and as she folded the rl in a long embrace, she whispered, "God bless y Olive!" and then suffered him to lead her ray.

But when the last good-byes were said, and the rriage door was closed by Richard, Mildred oked up and waved her hand towards the lobby ndow. She could see the white dress and dusky lo of hair, the drooping figure and tightly-locked nds, but as the sound of the wheels died away the distance, Olive hid her face in her hands and ayed, with a burst of tears, that the promise she d made might be faithfully kept.

An hour later, Richard found her still sitting ere, looking spent and weary, and took her out walk with him.

"The rest have all started for Podgill. We will follow them more leisurely. The air will refresh us both, Olive;" stealing a glance at the reddened eyelids, that told their own tale. Olive so seldom shed tears, that the relief was almost a luxury to her. She felt less oppressed now.

"But Ethel—where is she, Cardie?" unwilling to let him sacrifice himself for her pleasure. She little knew that Richard was carrying out Mildred's last injunctions.

"I leave Olive in your care; be good to her, Richard," she had said as he had closed the carriage door on her, and he had understood her and given her an affirmative look.

"Ethel has a headache, and has gone home," he replied. "She feels this as much as any of us; she did not like breaking up the party, but I saw how much she needed quiet, and persuaded her. She wants you to go up there to-morrow and talk to her."

"But, Cardie," stopping to look at him, "I am sure you have a headache too."

"So I have, and it is pretty bad, but I thought a walk would do us both good, and we might as well be miserable together, to tell you the truth," with an attempt at a laugh. "I can't stand the house without Aunt Milly, and I thought you were feeling the same."

"Dear Cardie, how good of you to think of me at all," returned Olive, gratefully. Her brother's evident sympathy was already healing in its effects. Just now she had felt so lonely, so forlorn, it made her better to feel that he was missing Aunt Milly too.

She looked up at him in her mild affectionate way as he walked beside her. She thought, as she had often thought before, how well the straitly-cut clerical garb became him—its severe simplicity suiting so well the grave young face. How handsome, how noble he must look in Ethel's eyes!

"We are so used to have Aunt Milly thinking for us, that it will be hard to think for ourselves," she went on presently, when they were walking down by the weir. "You will have to put up with a great deal from me, and to be very patient, though you are always that now, Cardie."

"Am I?" he returned, touched by her earnestness. Olive had always been loyal to him, even when he had most neglected her; and he had neglected her somewhat of late, he thought. "I will tell you what we must do, Livy; we must try to help each other, and to be more to each other than we have been. You see Rex has Polly, but I have no one, not even Aunt Milly now; at least we cannot claim her so much now."

- "You have Ethel, Cardie."
- "Yes, but not in the way I want," he returned, the sensitive colour flitting over his face. He could never hear or speak her name unmoved; she was far more to him now than she had ever been when he thought of her less as the youthful goddess he had adored in his boyish days, than as the woman he desired to have as his wife. He no longer cast a glamour of his own devising over her image, faulty as well as lovable he knew her to be; but all the same he craved her for his own.

"Not one man in a hundred, not one in a thousand, would make her happy," he said more than once to himself; "but it is because I believe myself to be that man that I persevere. If I did not think this, I would take her at her word and go on my way."

Now, as he answered Olive, a sadness crossed his face, and she saw it. Might it not be that she could help him even here? He had talked about his trouble to Aunt Milly, she knew. Could she not win him to some confidence in herself? Here

was a beginning of the work Aunt Milly had left her.

"Dear Cardie, I should so like it if you would talk to me sometimes about Ethel," she said, hesitating, as though fearing how he would like it. "I know how often it makes you unhappy. I can always see just when it is troubling you, but I never could speak of it before."

"Why not, Livy?" not abruptly, but questioning.

"One is so afraid of saying the wrong things, and then you might not have liked it," stammering in her old way.

"I must always like to talk of what is so dear to me," he replied, gravely. "I could as soon blot out my own individuality, as blot out the hope of seeing Ethel my future wife; and in that case, it were strange indeed if I did not love to talk of her."

"Yes, and I have always felt as though it must come right in the end," interposed Olive, eagerly; "her manner gives me that impression."

"What impression?" he asked, startled by her carnestness.

"I can't help thinking she cares for you, though

she does not know it; at least she will not allow herself to know it. I have seen her draw herself so proudly sometimes when you have left her. I am sure she is hardening her heart against herself, Cardie."

A faint smile rose to his lips. "Livy, who would have thought you could have said such comforting things, just when I was losing heart too?"

"You must never do that," she returned, in an old-fashioned way that amused him, and yet reminded him somehow of Mildred. "Any one like you, Cardie, ought never to lose courage."

"Courage, Cœur-de-Lion!" he returned, mimicking her tone more gaily as his spirits insensibly rose under the sisterly flattery. "God bless her! she is worth waiting for; there is no other woman in the world to me. Who would have thought we should have got on this subject to-day, of all days in the year? but you have done me no end of good, Livy."

"Then I have done myself good," she returned, simply; and indeed some sweet hopeful influence seemed to have crept on her during the last half-hour; she thought how Mildred's loving sympathy

would have been aroused if she could have told her how Richard and she had mutually comforted themselves in their dulness. But something still stranger to her experience happened that night before she slept.

She was lying awake later than usual, pondering over the events of the day, when a stifled sound, strongly resembling a sob promptly swallowed by a simulated yawn, reached her ear.

"Chrissy, dear, is there anything the matter?" she inquired, anxiously, trying to grope her way to the huddled heap of bed-clothes.

"No, thank you," returned Chriss, with dignity; "what should be the matter? good-night. I believe I am getting sleepy," with another artfully-constructed yawn which did not in the least deceive Olive.

Chrissy was crying, that was clear; and Olive's sympathy was wide-awake as usual; but how was she with her clumsy, well-meaning efforts to overcome the prickles?

Chriss was well known to have a soul above sympathy, which she generally resented as impertinent; nevertheless Olive's voice grew aggravatingly soft.

"I thought perhaps you might feel dull about Aunt Milly," she began, hesitating; "we do—and so——"

"I don't know, I am sure, whom you mean by your aggravating we's," snapped Chriss; "but it is very hard a person can't have their feelings without coming down on them like a policeman and taking them in charge."

"Well, then, I won't say another word, Chriss," returned her sister, good-humouredly.

But this did not mollify Chriss.

"Speaking won't hurt a person when they are sore all over," she replied, with her usual contradiction. "I hate prying, of course, and it is a pity one can't enjoy a comfortable little cry without being put through one's catechism. But I do want Aunt Milly. There!" finished Chriss, with another ominous shaking of the bed-clothes; "and I want her more than you do and all your mysterious we's."

"I meant Cardie," replied Olive, mildly, too much used to Chriss's oddities to be repulsed by them. "You have no idea how much he misses her and all her nice quiet ways."

Chriss stopped her ears decidedly.

"I don't want to hear anything about Aunt

Milly; you and Richard made her a sort of golden nage. It is very unkind of you, Olive, to speak bout her now, when you know how horrid and sagreeable and cross and altogether abominable have always been to her," and here honest tears aoked Chriss's utterance.

A warm thrill pervaded Olive's frame; here was nother piece of work left for her to do. She must ain influence over the cross-grained warped little iece of human nature beside her: hitherto there id been small sympathy between the sisters. live's dreamy susceptibilities and Chriss's shrewdess had kept them apart. Chriss had always made a point of honour to contradict Olive in everying, and never until now had she ever managed insert the thinnest wedge between Chriss's bristing self-esteem and general pugnacity.

"Oh, Chriss," she cried, almost tremblingly, in it eagerness to impart some consolation, "there not one of us who cannot blame ourselves in me way. I am sure I have not been as nice as might have been to Aunt Milly."

Chriss shook her shoulder pettishly.

"Dear me, that is so like you, Olive; you are the ost funnily-constructed person I ever saw—all etry and conscience. When you are not dream-

ing with your eyes open you are always reading yourself a homily."

"I wish I were nice for all your sakes," replied Olive, meekly, not in the least repudiating this personal attack.

"Oh, as to that, you are nice enough," retorted Chriss, briskly. "You won't come up to Aunt Milly, so it is no use trying, but all the same I mean to stick to you. I don't intend you to be quite drowned dead in your responsibilities. If you say a thing, however stupid it is, I shall think it my duty to back you up, so I warn you to be careful."

"Dear Chriss, I am so much obliged to you," replied Olive, with tears in her eyes.

She perfectly understood by this somewhat vague sentence that Chriss was entering into a solemn league and covenant with her, an alliance aggressive and defensive for all future occasions.

"There is not another tolerably comfortable person in the house," grumbled Chriss; "one might as well talk to a monk as to Richard; the corners of his mouth are beginning to turn down already with ultra-goodness, and now he has taken to the Noah's Ark style of dress one has no comfort in contradicting him."

"Chrissy, how can you say such things? Cardie has never been so dear and good in his life."

"And then there are Rex and Polly," continued Chriss, ignoring this interruption; "the way they talk in corners and the foolish things they say! I have made up my mind, Livy, never to be in love, not even if I marry my professor. I will be kind to him and sew on his buttons once in a way, and order him nice things for dinner; but if he sent me on errands as Rex does Polly I would just march out of the room and never see his face again. I am so glad that no one will think of marrying you, Olive," she finished, sleepily, disposing herself to rest; "every family ought to have an old maid, and a poetical one will be just the thing."

Olive smiled; she always took these sort of speeches as a matter of course. It never entered her head that any other scheme of life were possible with her. She was far too humble-minded and aware of her shortcomings to imagine that she could find favour in any man's eyes. She lay with a lightened heart long after Chriss had fallen into a sweet sleep, thinking how she could do her best for the froward young creature beside her.

"I have begun work in earnest to-day," she

thought, "first Cardie and now Chriss. Oh, how hard I will try not to disappoint them!"

Dr. Heriot had hoped to secure some five weeks of freedom from work, but before the month had fully elapsed he had an urgent recall home. Richard had telegraphed to him that they were all in great anxiety about Mr. Trelawny. There had been a paralytic seizure, and his daughter was in deep distress. They had sent for a physician from Kendal, but as the case required watching, Dr. Heriot knew how urgently his presence would be desired.

He went in search of his wife immediately, and found her sitting in a quiet nook in the Lowood Gardens overlooking Windermere.

The book they had been reading together lay unheeded on her lap. Mildred's eyes were fixed on the shining lake and the hills, with purple shadows stealing over them. Her husband's step on the turf failed to rouse her, so engrossing was her reverie, till his hand was laid on her shoulder.

"John, how you startled me!"

"I have been looking for you everywhere, Milly, darling," he returned, sitting down beside her. "I have been watching you for ever so long, I wanted to know what other people thought of my wife, and

so for once I resolved to be a disinterested spectator."

- "Hush, your wife does not like you to talk nonsense;" but all the same Mildred blushed beautifully.
- "Unfortunately she has to endure it," he replied, coolly. "After all I think people will be satisfied You are a young-looking woman, Milly, especially since you have left off wearing grey."
- "As though I mind what people think," she returned, smiling, pleased with his praise.

Was it not sufficient for her that she was fair in his eyes? Dr. Heriot had a fastidious taste with regard to ladies' dress. In common with many men, he preferred rich dark materials with a certain depth and softness of colouring, and already, with the nicest tact, she contrived to satisfy him. Mildred was beginning to lose the old-fashioned staidness and precision that had once marked her style; others besides her husband thought the quiet, restful face had a certain beauty of its own.

And he. There were some words written by the wise king of old which often rose to his lips as he looked at her—"The heart of her husband does safely trust in her; she will do him good and not evil all the days of her life." How had it ever come

that he had won for himself this blessing? There were times when he almost felt abashed before the purity and goodness of this woman; the simplicity and truthfulness of her words, the meekness with which she ever obeyed him. "If I can only be worthy of my Mildred's love, if I can be what she thinks me," he often said to himself. As he sat beside her now a feeling of regret crossed him that this should be their last evening in this sweet place.

"Shall you be very much disappointed, my wife" (his favourite name for her), "if we return home a few days earlier than we planned?"

She looked up quickly.

- "Disappointed to go home, and with you, John! But why? is there anything the matter?"
- "Not at the vicarage, but Mr. Trelawny is very ill, and Richard has telegraphed for me. What do you say, Mildred?"
- "That we must go at once. Poor Ethel. Of course she will want you, she always had such faith in you. Dr. Strong is no favourite at Kirkleatham."
- "Yes, I think we ought to go," he returned, slowly; "you will be a comfort to the poor girl, and of course I must be at my post. I am only so sorry our pleasant trip must end."
  - "Yes, and it was doing you so much good," she

eplied, looking fondly at the dark face, now no onger thin and wan. "I should have liked you to have had another week's rest before you began work."

"Never mind," he returned, cheerfully, "we will not waste this lovely evening with regrets. Where are your wraps, Mildred? I mean to fetch them and row you on the lake; there will be a glorious moon this evening."

The next night as Richard crossed the marketplace on his way from Kirkleatham he saw lights in the window of the low grey house beside the Bank, and the next minute Dr. Heriot came out, swinging the gate behind him. Richard sprang to meet him.

- "My telegram reached you then at Windermere? I am so thankful you have come. Where is Aunt Milly?"
- "There," motioning to the house; "do you think I should leave my wife behind me? Let me hear a little about things, Richard. Are you going my way; to Kirkleatham, I mean?"
- "Yes, I will turn back with you. I have been up there most of the time. He seems to like me, and no one else can lift him. It seemed hard breaking into your holiday, Dr. Heriot, but what

could I do? We are sure he dislikes Dr. Strong, and then Ethel seemed so wretched."

"Poor girl; the sudden seizure must have terrified her."

"Oh, I must tell you about that, I promised her I would. You see he has taken this affair of the election too much to heart; every one told him he would fail, and he did not believe them. In his obstinacy he has squandered large sums of money, and she believes this to be preying on his mind."

"That and the disappointment."

"As to that his state was pitiable. He came back from Kendal looking as ill as possible and full of bitterness against her. She has no want of courage, but she owned she was almost terrified when she looked at him. She does not say much, but one can tell what she has been through."

Dr. Heriot nodded. Too well he understood the state of the case. Mr. Trelawny's paroxysms of temper had latterly become almost uncontrollable.

"He parted from her in anger, his last words being that she had ruined her father, and then he went up to his dressing-room. Shortly after a servant in an adjoining room heard a heavy fall, and alarmed the household. They found him lying speechless and unable to move. Ethel says when

hey had laid him on his bed and he had recovered onsciousness a little, his eyes followed her with a rightened, questioning look that went to her heart, nd which no soothing on her part could remove. The whole of the right side is affected, and though he has recovered speech, the articulation is very mperfect, impossible to understand at present, which makes it very distressing."

"Poor Miss Trelawny, I fear she has sad work pefore her."

"She looks wretchedly ill over it; but what can ne expect from such a shock? She shows admirble self-command in the sick-room; she only reaks down when she is away from him. I am o glad she will have Aunt Milly. Now I must go pack, as Marsden is away and I have to copy some papers for my father. I shall go back in a couple of hours to take the first share of the night's nursing."

"You will find me there," was Dr. Heriot's reply as they shook hands and parted.

## CHAPTER XI.

## OLIVE'S DECISION.

'Be good, sweet maid, and let who can be clever;
Do lovely things, not dream them all day long;
And so make Life, Death, and that vast For Ever,
One grand sweet song."

Charles Kingsley.

ETHEL TRELAWNY had long felt as though some crisis in her life were impending.

To her it seemed impossible that the unnatural state of things between her father and herself could any longer continue; something must occur to break the hideous monotony and constraint of those slowly revolving weeks and months. Latterly there had come to her that strange listening feeling to which some peculiar and sensitive temperaments are subject, when in the silence they can distinctly hear the muffled footfall of approaching sorrow.

Yet what sorrow could be more terrible than this estrangement, this death of a father's love, this chill cloud of distrust that had risen up between them!

And yet when the blow fell, filial instinct woke in the girl's soul, all the stronger for its represon. There were times during those first fortyight hours when she would gladly have laid down er own life if she could have restored power to lose fettered limbs, and peace to that troubled rain.

Oh, if she could only have blotted out those last uel words—if they would cease to ring in her urs!

She had met him almost timidly, knowing how eavily the bitterness of his failure would lie upon im.

"Papa, I fear things have not gone well with ou," she had said, and there had been a caressing, most a pitying chord in her voice as she spoke.

"How should things go well with me when my wn child opposes my interest?" he had answered, loomily. "I have wasted time and substance, I ave fooled myself in the eyes of other men, and ow I must hide my head in this obscurity which as grown so hateful to me, and it is all your fault, thel."

"Papa, listen to me," she pleaded. "Ambition not everything; why have you set your heart on its thing? It is embittering your life and mine.

Other men have been disappointed, and it has not gone so very hard with them. Why will you not let yourself be comforted?"

"There is no comfort for me," he had replied, and his face had been very old and haggard as he spoke. It were far better that she had not spoken; her words, few and gentle as they were, only added to the fuel of his discontent; he had meant to shut himself up in his sullenness, and make no sign; but she had intercepted his retreat, and brought down the vials on her devoted head.

Could she ever forget the angry storm that followed? Surely he must have been beside himself to have spoken such words! How was it that she had been accused of jilting Mr. Cathcart, of refusing his renewed overtures, merely from obstinacy, and the desire of opposition; that she should hear herself branded as her father's worst enemy?

"You and your pride have done for me!" he had said, lashing himself up to fresh fury with the remembrance of past mortification. "You have taken from me all that would make life desirable. You have been a bad daughter to me, Ethel. You have spoiled the work of a lifetime."

"Papa, papa, I have only acted rightly. How

could I have done this evil thing, even for your sake?" she had cried, but he had not listened to her.

"You have jilted the man you fancied out of pride, and now the mischief will lie on your own head," he had answered, angrily, and then he had turned to leave the room.

Half an hour afterwards the heavy thud of a fall had been heard, and the man had come to her with a white face to summon her to her father's bedside.

She knew then what had come upon them. At the first sight of that motionless figure, speechless, inert, struck down with unerring force, in the very prime and strength of life, she knew how it would be with them both.

"Oh, my dear, my dear, forgive me," she had cried, falling on her knees beside the bed, and raining tears over the rigid hands; and yet what was there to forgive? Was it not rather she who had been sinned against? What words were those the paralysed tongue refused to speak? What was the meaning of those awful questioning eyes that rested on her day and night, when partial consciousness returned? Could it be that he would have entreated her forgiveness?

"Papa, papa, do not look so," she would say i a voice that went to Richard's heart. "Don't yok know me? I am Ethel, your own, only child. will love you and take care of you, papa. Do you hear me, dear? There is nothing to forgive—nothing—nothing."

During the strain of those first terrible days Richard was everything to her; without him she would literally have sunk under her misery.

"O, Richard, have I killed my father? Am I his murderess?" she cried once almost hysterically when they were left alone together. "Oh, poor papa—poor papa!"

"Dear Ethel, you have done no wrong," he replied, taking her unresisting hand; "it is no fault of yours, dearest; you have been the truest, the most patient of daughters. He has brought it on himself."

"Ah, but it was through me that this happened," she returned, shuddering through every nerve. "If I had married Mr. Cathcart, he would not have lost his seat, and then he would not have fretted himself ill."

"Ought we to do evil that good may come, Ethel?" replied Richard, gravely. "Are children esponsible for the wrong-doing of their parents? If there be sin, it lies at your father's door, not yours; it is you to forgive, not he."

"Richard, how can you be so hard?" she emanded, with a flash of her old spirit through her sobs; but it died away miserably.

"I am not hard to him—God forbid! Am I likely to be hard to your father, Ethel, and now especially?" he said, somewhat reproachfully, but speaking with the quiet decision that soothed her even then. "I cannot have you unfitting yourself for your duties by indulging these morbid ideas; no one blames you—you have done right; another time you will be ready to acknowledge it yourself; you have enough to suffer, without adding to your burden. I entreat you to banish these fancies, once and for ever. Ethel, promise me you will try to do so."

"Yes, yes, I know you are right," she returned, weeping bitterly; "only it breaks my heart to see him like this."

"You are spent and weary," he replied, gently; "to-morrow you will look at these things in a different light. It has been such an awful shock to you, you see," and then he brought her wine, and

compelled her to drink it, and with much persuasion induced her to seek an hour or two's repose before returning to the sick-room.

What would she have done without him, she thought, as she closed her heavy eyes. Uncorsciously they seemed to have resumed their of relations towards each other; it was Richard and Ethel now. Richard's caressing manner had returned; no brother could have watched over her more devotedly, more reverently; and yet he had never loved her so well as when, all her imperousness gone, and with her brave spirit well night broken, she seemed all the more dependent on his sympathy and care.

But the first smile that crossed her face was for Mildred, when Dr. Heriot brought her up to Kirkleatham the first evening after their arrival. Mildred almost cried over her when she took her in her arms; the contrast to her own happiness was so great.

"Oh, Ethel, Ethel," was all she could say, "my poor girl!"

"Yes, I am that and much more," she returned, yielding to her friend's embrace; "utterly poor and wretched. Has he—has Dr. Heriot told you all he feared?"

'That there can only be partial recovery? Yes, now he fears that; but then one cannot tell in the cases; you may have him still for years."

Ah, but if he should have another stroke? I w what Dr. Heriot thinks—it is a bad case; as said so to Richard."

Poor child! it is so hard not to be able to fort you."

No one can do that so long as I have him re my eyes in this state. Mildred, you cannot eive what a wreck he is; no power of speech, those inarticulate sounds."

I am glad Cardie is able to be so much with

sensitive colour overspread Ethel's worn

I do not know what I should have done withhim," she returned, in a low voice. "If he been my own brother he could not have done for me; we fancy papa likes to have him, he strong and quiet, and always sees what is the thing to be done."

I found out Cardie's value long ago; he was ight hand during Olive's illness."

He is every one's right hand, I think," was the t answer. "He was the first to suggest tele-

graphing for Dr. Heriot. I could not bear breaking in upon your holiday, but it could not be helped."

"Do you think we could have stayed away?"

"All the same it is a sad welcome to your new home; but you are a doctor's wife now. Mildred, if you knew what it was to me to see your dear face near me again."

"I am so thankful John brought me."

"Ah, but he will take you away again. I can hear his step now."

"Poor girl! her work is cut out for her," observed Dr. Heriot, thoughtfully, as they walked homewards through the crofts. "It will be a sad, lingering case, and I fear that the brain is greatly affected from what they tell me. He must have had a slight stroke many years ago."

"Poor, poor Ethel," replied Mildred, sorrowfully. "I must be with her as much as possible; but Richard seems her greatest comfort."

"Perhaps good may come out of evil. You see, I can guess at your thought, Milly darling," and then their talk flowed into a less sad channel.

But not all Mildred's sympathy, or Richard's goodness, could avail to make those long weeks and months of misery otherwise than dreary; and nobly as Ethel Trelawny performed her duty, there were times when her young heart sickened and grew heavy with pain in the oppressive atmosphere of that weary sick-room.

To her healthy vitality, the spectacle of her father's helplessness was simply terrible; the inertness of the fettered limbs, the indistinct utterance of the tied and faltering tongue, the confusion of the benumbed brain, oppressed her like a nightmare. There were times when her pity for him was so great, that she would have willingly laid down all her chances of happiness in this life if she could have restored to him the prospect of health.

It was now that the real womanhood of Ethel Trelawny rose to the surface. Richard's heart ached with its fulness of love when he saw her day after day so meekly and patiently tending her afflicted father; the worn pale face and eyes heavy with trouble and want of sleep was far more beautiful to him now; but he hid his feelings with his usual self-control. She had learned to depend upon him and trust him, and this state of things was too precious to be disturbed.

Richard was his father's sole curate now. Towards the end of October, Hugh Marsden had finished his preparations, and had bidden good-bye to his friends at the vicarage. Mildred, who saw him last, was struck with the change in the young man's manner; his cheerful serenity had vanished—he looked subdued, almost agitated.

She was sitting at work in the little glass room; a tame canary was skimming among the flowers, Dr. Heriot's voice was heard cheerfully whistling from an inner room, some late blooming roses lay beside Mildred, her husband's morning gift, the book from which he had been reading to her was still open on the table; the little domestic picture smote the young man's heart with a dull pain.

"I am come to say good-bye, Mrs. Heriot," he said, in a sadder voice than she had ever heard from him before; "and it has come to this, that I would sooner say any other word."

"We shall miss you dreadfully, Mr. Marsden," replied Mildred, looking regretfully up at the plain honest face. Hugh Marsden had always been a favourite with her, and she was loath to say goodbye to him.

"Others have been kind enough to tell me so," he rejoined, twirling his shabby felt hat between his fingers. "Miss Olive, Miss Lambert I mean, just now. Somehow, I had hoped—but no, s decided rightly."

dred looked up in surprise. Incoherence ew in Hugh Marsden; but just now his eloquence seemed to have deserted him.

hat has Olive decided?" she asked, with a spasm of curiosity; and then she added, "Sit down, Mr. Marsden, you do not seem yourself; all this leave-taking has tired you." he shook his head.

have no time; you must not tempt me, Mrs.; only you have always been so good to me, wanted to ask you to say this for me."

hat am I to say?" asked Mildred, feeling a pewildered.

was still standing before her, twirling his hat big hands, his broad face flushed a little.

ell Miss Olive that I know she has acted r; she always does, you know. It would be hing to have such a woman as that beside trengthening one's hands; but of course it t be—she could not deviate from her duty pair's-breadth."

do not know if I understand you," began ed, slowly, and groping her way to the truth.

"I think you do. I think you have always understood me," returned the young man, more quickly. "And you will tell her this from me. Of course one must have regrets, but it cannot be helped; good-bye, Mrs. Heriot. A thousand thanks for all you have done for me." And before Mildred could answer, he had wrung her hand, and was half-way through the hall.

An hour later, Mildred stole softly down the vicarage lobby, and knocked at the door of the room she had once occupied, and Olive's voice bade her enter.

- "Aunt Milly, I never thought it was you," she exclaimed, rising hastily from the low chair by the window. "Is Dr. Heriot with you?"
- "No; I left John at home. I told him that I wanted to have a little talk with you, and like a model husband he asked no questions, and raised no obstacles. All the same I expect he will follow me."
- "You wanted to talk to me?" returned Olive, in a questioning tone, but her sallow face flushed a little. "How strange, when I was just wishing for you too."
- "There must be some electric sympathy between us," replied her aunt, smiling. "Nothing could

have induced me to sleep until I had seen you.

Mr. Marsden wished me to give you a message
from him; he was a little incoherent, but so far as
I understand, he wished me to assure you that he
considers yours a right decision."

Olive's face brightened a little. Mildred had already detected unusual sadness on it, but her calmness was baffling.

- "Did he tell you to say that? How kind of him!"
- "He did not stop to explain himself; he was in too great a hurry; but I thought he seemed troubled. What was the decision, Olive? Has this helped you to make it?" touching reverently the open page of a Bible that lay beside her.

The brown light in Olive's eyes grew steady and intense; she looked like one who had found rest in a certainty.

- "I have just been preaching to myself from that text: 'He that putteth his hand to the plough and looketh backward,' you know, Aunt Milly. Well, that seems to point as truly to me as it does to Mr. Marsden."
- "Yes, dearest," replied Mildred, softly; "and now what has he said to you?"
  - "I hardly know myself," was the low-toned

answer. "I have been thinking it all over, and I cannot now understand how it was; it seems so wonderful that any one could care enough for me," speaking to herself, with a soft, bewildered smile.

"Does Mr. Marsden care for you? I thought so from the first, Olive."

"I suppose he does, or else he would not have said what he did; it was difficult to know his meaning at first, he was so embarrassed, and I was so slow; but we understood each other at last."

"Tell me all he said, dear," pleaded Mildred. Could it be her own love story that Olive was treating so simply? There was a chord of sadness in her voice, and a film gathered over the brightness of her eyes, but there was no agitation in her manner; the deep of her soul might be touched, but the surface was calm.

"There is not much to tell, Aunt Milly, but of course you may know all. We had said good-bye, and I had spoken a word or two about his work, and how I thought it the most beautiful work that a man could do, and then he asked me if I should ever be willing to share in it."

"Well?"

"I did not understand him at first, as I told you, until he made his meaning more plain, and then I

saw how it was, that he hoped that one day I might give myself heart and soul to the same work; that my talent, beautiful, as he owned it to be, might not hinder me from such a glorious reality—'the reality,'" and here for the first time she faltered and grew crimson, "'of such work as must fall to a missionary's wife.'"

"Olive, my dear child," exclaimed Mildred, now really startled, "did he say as much as that?"

"Yes, indeed, Aunt Milly; and he asked if I could care enough for him to make such a sacrifice."

"My dear, how very sudden."

"It did not seem so. I cannot make out why I was not more surprised. It came to me as though I had expected it all along. Of course I told him that I liked him better than any one else I had seen, but that I never thought that any one could care for me in that way; and then I told him that while my father lived nothing would induce me to leave him."

"And what did he say to that?"

"That he was afraid this would be my answer, but that he knew I was deciding rightly, that he had never meant to say so much, only that the last minute he could not help it; and then he begged that we might remain friends, and asked vol. III.

me not to forget him and his work in my prayers, and then he went away."

"And for once in your life you decided without Aunt Milly."

The girl looked up quickly. "Was it wrong? You could not have counselled me to give a different answer, and even if you had—" hesitating, "Oh, I could not have said otherwise, there was no conflicting duty there, Aunt Milly."

"Dearest, from my heart I believe you are right. Your father could ill spare you."

"I am thankful to hear you say so. Of course," heaving a little sigh, "it was very hard seeing him go away like that, but I never doubted which was my duty for a moment. As long as papa and Cardie want me, nothing could induce me to leave them."

"I suppose you will tell them this, Olive?"

"No, oh no," she replied, shrinking back, "that would spoil all. It would be to lose the fruit of the sacrifice; it might grieve them too. No, no one must know this but you and I, Aunt Milly; it must be sacred to us three. I told Mr. Marsden so."

"Perhaps you are right," returned her aunt, thoughtfully. "Richard thinks so highly of him,

he might give you no peace on the subject. When we have once made up our minds to a certain course of action, arguments are as wearying as they are fruitless, and overmuch pity is good for no one. But, dear Olive, I cannot refrain from telling you how much I honour you for this decision."

"Honour me, Aunt Milly!" and Olive's pale face flushed with strong emotion.

"How can I help it? There are so few who really act up to their principles in this world, who when the moment for self-sacrifice comes are able cheerfully to count the cost and renounce the desire of their heart. Ah!" she continued, "when I think of your yearning after a missionary life, and that you are giving up a woman's brightest prospect for the sake of an ailing parent, I feel that you have done a very noble thing indeed."

"Hush, I do not deserve all this praise. I am only doing my duty."

"True; and after all we are only unprofitable servants. I wish I had your humility, Olive. I feel as though I should be too happy sometimes if it were not for the sorrows of others. They are shadows on the sunshine. Ethel is always in my thoughts, and now you will be there too."

"I do not think—I do not mean to be unhappy," faltered Olive. "'God loveth' a cheerful giver,' I must remember that, Aunt Milly. Perhaps," she continued, more humbly, "I am not fit for the work. Perhaps he might be disappointed in me, and I should only drag him down. Don't you recollect what papa once said in one of his sermons about obstacles standing like the angel with the drawn sword before Balaam, to turn us from the way?"

Mildred sighed. How often she had envied the childish faith which lay at the bottom of Olive's character, though hidden by the troublesome scrupulousness of a too sensitive conscience. Was the healthy growth she had noticed latterly owing to Mr. Marsden's influence, or had she really, by God's grace, trodden on the necks of her enemies?

"You must not be sorry about all this," continued the girl, earnestly, noticing the sigh. "You don't know how glad I am that Mr. Marsden cares for me."

"I cannot help feeling that some day it will all come right," returned Mildred.

"I must not think about that," was the hurried answer. "Aunt Milly, please never to say or hint such a thing again. It would be wrong; it would make me restless and dissatisfied. I shall always think of him as a dear friend—but—but I mean to be Olive Lambert all my life."

Mildred smiled and kissed her, and then consented very reluctantly to change the subject, but nevertheless she held to her opinion as firmly as Olive to hers.

Mildred might well say that the sorrows of others shadowed her brightness. During the autumn and winter that followed her marriage her affectionate heart was often oppressed by thoughts of that dreary sick-room. Her husband had predicted from the first that only partial recovery could be expected in Mr. Trelawny's case. A few months or years of helplessness was all that remained to the once lithe and active frame of the master of Kirkleatham.

It was a pitiable wreck that met Richard's eyes one fine June evening in the following year, when he went up to pay his almost daily visit. They had wheeled the invalid on to the sunny terrace that he might enjoy the beautiful view. Below them lay the old grey buildings and church of Kirkby Stephen. The pigeons were sitting in rows on the tower, preparatory to roosting in one of the unoccupied rooms; through the open door

one had glimpses of the dark-painted window, with its fern-bordered ledge, and the gleaming javelins on the wall. A book lay on Ethel's lap, but she had long since left off turning the pages. The tale, simple as it was, was wearying to the invalid's oppressed brain. Her wan face brightened at the young curate's approach.

"How is he?" asked Richard in a low voice as he approached her, and dropping his voice.

Ethel shook her head. "He is very weary and wandering to-night; worse than usual, I fancy. Papa, Richard has come to see us; he is waiting to shake hands with you."

"Richard—ay, a good lad—a good lad," returned the sick man, listlessly. His voice was still painfully thick and indistinct, and his eyes had a dull look of vacancy. "You must excuse my left hand, Richard," with an attempt at his old courtliness; "the other is numb or gone to sleep; it is of no use to me at all. Ah, I always told Lambert he ought to be proud of his sons."

"His thoughts are running on the boys tonight," observed Ethel, in a low voice. "He keeps asking after Rupert, and just now he fancied I was my poor mother."

Richard gave her a grave pitying look, and

turned to the invalid. "I am glad to see you out this lovely evening," he said, trying gently to rouse his attention, for the thin, dark face had a painful, abstracted look.

"Ah, it is beautiful enough," replied Mr. Frelawny, absently. "I am waiting for the boys; nave you seen them, Richard? Agatha sent them lown to the river to bathe; she spoils them dreadfully. Rupert is a fine swimmer; he does everything well; he is his mother's favourite."

"I think Ethel is looking pale, Mr. Trelawny. Aunt Milly has sent me to fetch her for an hour, if you can spare her?"

"I can always spare Ethel; she is not much use to me. Girls are generally in the way; they are poor things compared with boys. Where is the child, Agatha? Tell her to make haste; we must not keep Richard waiting."

"Dear papa," pleaded the girl, "you are dreaming to-night. Your poor Ethel is beside you."

"Ah, to be sure," passing his hand wearily through his whitening hair. "I get confused; you are so like your mother. Ask this gentleman to wheel me in, Ethel; I am getting tired."

"Is he often like this?" asked Richard, when at last she was free to join him in the porch. The

curfew bell was ringing as they walked through the dewy crofts among the tall, sleeping daisies; the cool breeze fanned Ethel's hot temples.

"Yes, very often," she returned, in a dejected tone. "It is this that tries me so. If he would only talk to me a little as he used to do before things went wrong; but he only seems to live in the past—his wife and his boys—but it is chiefly Rupert now."

"And yet he seems restless without you."

"That is the strangest part; he seems to know me through it all. There are times when he is a little clearer; when he seems to think there is something between us; and then nothing satisfies him, unless I sit beside him and hold his hand. It is so hard to hear him begging my forgiveness over and over again for some imaginary wrong he fancies he has done me."

"Poor Ethel! Yet he was never dearer to you than he is now?"

"Never," she returned, drying her eyes. "Night and day he engrosses my thoughts. I seem to have no room for anything else. Do you know, Richard, I can understand now the passionate pity mothers feel for a sick child, for whom they sacri-

fice rest and comfort. There is nothing I would not do for papa."

"Aunt Milly says your devotion to him is beautiful."

Ethel's face grew paler. "You must not tell me that, Richard; you do not consider that I have to retrieve the coldness of a lifetime. After all, poor papa is right. I have not been a good daughter to him; I have been carping and disagreeable; I have presumed to sit in judgment on my own father; I have separated myself and my pursuits from his, and alienation was the result."

"For which you were not wholly to blame," he replied, gently, unable to hear those self-accusations unmoved. Why was she, the dearest and the truest, to go heavily all her days for sins that were not her own?

"No, you must not blame him," she continued, beseechingly. "Is he not bearing his own punishment? am I not bearing mine? Oh, it is dreadful!" her voice suddenly choked with strong emotion. "Bodily sufferings I could have witnessed with far less misery than I feel at the spectacle of this help-lessness and mental decay; to talk to dull ears, to arrest wandering thoughts, to listen hour after hour

to confused rambling. Richard, this seems harder than anything."

"If He—the Master I mean—fell under His cross, do we wonder that we at times sink under ours?" was the low, reverent answer. "Ethel, I sometimes think how wonderful it will be to turn the page of suffering in another world, and, with eyes purified from earthly rheum, to spell out all the sacred meaning of the long trial that we considered so unbearable — nay, sometimes so unjust."

Ethel did not trust herself to speak, but a grateful glance answered him. It was not the first time he had comforted her with words which had sunk deep into a subdued and softened heart. She was learning her lesson now, and the task was a hard one to poor passionate human flesh and blood. If what Richard said was true, she would not have a pang too many; the sorrowful moments would be numbered to her by the same Father, without whom not even a sparrow could fall to the ground. Could she not safely trust her father to Him?

"Richard, I am always praying to come down from my cross," she said at last, looking up at the young clergyman with sweet humid eyes. "And after all He has fastened us there with His own hands. I suppose it is faith and patience for which one should ask, and not only relief?"

"He will give that too in His own good time," returned Richard, solemnly, and then, as was often the case, a short silence fell between them.

## CHAPTER XII.

## BERENGARIA.

"I have led her home, my love, my only friend,
There is none like her, none.
And never yet so warmly ran my blood,
And sweetly on and on,
Calming itself to the long-wished-for end,
Full to the banks, close on the promised good.

None like her, none."—Tennyson's 'Maud.'

Two years had elapsed since Olive Lambert had made her noble decision, and during that time triple events had happened. Mr. Trelawny's suffering life was over, Rex had married his faithful Polly, and Dr. Heriot and Mildred had rejoiced over their first-born son.

Mr. Trelawny did not long survive the evening when Richard found him on the sunny terrace; towards the end of the autumn there was a brief rally, a strange flicker of restless life; his confused faculties seemed striving to clear themselves; at times there was a strained dilated look in the dark eyes that was almost pitiful; he seemed unwilling to have Ethel out of his sight—even for a moment.

One night he called her to him. She was standing at the window finishing some embroidery by the fading light, but at the first sound of the weak, querulous tones, she turned her cheerful face towards him, for however weary she felt, there was always a smile for him.

"What is it, dear father?" for in those sad last days the holy name of father had come involuntarily to her lips. True, she had tasted little of his fatherhood, but still he was hers—her father.

"Put down that tiresome work and come to me," he went on, fretfully; "you are always at work—always—as though you had your bread to earn; there is plenty to spare for you. Rupert will take care of you, you need not fear, Ethel."

"No, dear, I am not afraid," she returned, coming to his side, and parting his hair with her soft fingers.

How often she had kissed those grey streaks, and the poor wrinkled forehead. He was an old man now, bowed and decrepit, sitting there with his lifeless arm folded to his side. But how she loved him—her poor, stricken father!

- "No, you were always a good girl. Ethel, are the boys asleep?"
- "Yes, both of them, father," leaning her cheek against his.
  - "And your mother?"
  - "Yes, dear."
- "I had a fancy I should like to hear Rupert's voice again. You remember his laugh, Ethel, so clear and ringing? Hal's was not like it; he was quiet and tame compared to Rupert. Ethel," wistfully, "it is a long time since I saw my boys."
- "My poor dear, a long, long time!" and then she whispered, almost involuntarily, "'I shall go to them, but they shall not return to me.'"

He caught the meaning partially.

"Yes, we will go to them—you and I," he returned, vacantly, patting her cheek as she hung over him. "Don't cry, Ethel, they are good boys, and shall have their rights; but I have not forgotten you. You have been a good daughter to me—better than I deserved. I shall tell your mother so when—"

But the sentence was never finished.

He had seemed drowsy after that, and she rang for the servant to wheel him into his own room. He was still heavy when she drew the curtains round him and wished him good-night; he looked placid and beautiful, she thought, as she leant over him for a last kiss; but he only smiled at her, and pressed her hand feebly.

That smile, how she treasured it! It was still on his lips when the servant who slept in his room, surprised at his master's long rest, undrew the curtains and found him lying as they left him last night—dead!

"You have been a good daughter to me—better than I deserved. I shall tell your mother so when——"

"Oh, Ethel, he has told her now! be comforted, darling," cried Mildred, when Ethel had thrown herself dry-eyed on her friend's bosom. "God do so to me and mine, as you have dealt with him in his trouble."

But for a long time the afflicted girl refused to be comforted.

Richard was smitten with dismay when he saw her for the first time after her father's death. Her paleness, her assumed calmness, filled him with foreboding trouble. Mildred had told him she had scarcely slept or eaten since the shock of her bereavement had come upon her.

She had come to him at once, and stood before

him in her black dress; the touch of her hand was so cold, that he had started at its clamminess; the uncomplaining sadness of her aspect brought the mist to his eyes.

"Dear Ethel, it has been sudden—awfully sudden," he said, at last, almost fearing to graze the edge of that dreary pause.

"Ah! that it has."

"That afternoon we had both been sitting with him. Do you remember he had complained of weariness, and yet he would not suffer us to wheel him in? Who would have thought his weariness would have been so soon at an end!"

She made no answer, only her bosom heaved a little. Yes, his weariness was over, but hers had begun; her filial work was taken from her, and her heart was sick with the sudden void in life. For months he had been her first waking and her last sleeping thoughts; his helplessness had brought out the latent devotion of her nature, and now she was alone!

"Will you let me see him?" whispered Richard, not daring to break on this sacred reserve of grief, and yet longing to speak some word of comfort to her stricken heart; and she had turned noiselessly and led him to the chamber of death.

There her fortitude had given way a little, and Richard was relieved to see her quiet tears coursing slowly down her cheeks, as they stood side by side looking on the still face with its changeless smile.

"Ethel, I am glad you have allowed me to see him," he said, at last; "he looks so calm and peaceful, all marks of age and suffering gone. Who could have the heart to break that rest?"

Then the pent-up pain found utterance.

- "Oh, Richard, think, never to have bidden him good-bye!"
- "Did you wish him good-night, dear? I thought you told me you always went to his bed-side the last thing before you slept?"
- "Yes—but I did not know," the tears flowing still more freely.
- "No—you only wished him good-night, and bade God bless him. Well, has He not blessed him?"

A sob was her only reply.

"Has He not given him the 'blessing of peace'? Is not His very seal of peace there stamped on that quiet brow? Dear Ethel, those words, 'He is not, for God took him,' always seem to me to apply so wonderfully to sudden death. You know," dropping his voice, and coming more closely,

"some men, good men, even, have such a horror of death."

"He had," in a tone almost inaudible.

"So I always understood. Think of the mercy shown to his weakness then, literally falling asleep; no slow approach of the enemy he feared; no deadly combat with the struggling flesh; only sleep, untroubled as a child; a waking, not here, but in another world."

Ethel still wept, but she felt less oppressed; no one could comfort her like Richard, not even Mildred.

As the days went on, Richard felt almost embarrassed by the trust she reposed in him. Ethel, who had always been singularly unconventional in her ideas, and was still in worldly matters as simple as a child, could see no reason why Richard should not manage things wholly for her. Richard in his perplexity was obliged to appeal to Dr. Heriot.

"She is ill, and shrinks from business; she wants me to see the lawyer. Surely you can explain to her how impossible it is for me to interfere with such matters? She treats the man who aspires to be her husband exactly like her brother," continued the young man, in a vexed, shamefaced way.

Dr. Heriot could hardly forbear a smile.

The master of Kirkleatham had been lying in his grave for weeks, but his faithful daughter still refused to be comforted. She moped piteously; all business fretted her; a quiet talk with Mildred or Richard was all of which her harassed nerves seemed capable.

"What can you expect?" he said, at last; "her long nursing has broken her down. She has a fine constitution, but the wear and tear of these months have been enough to wear out any woman. Leave her quiet for a little while to cry her heart out for her father."

"In the mean time, Mr. Grantham is waiting to have those papers signed, and to know if those leases are to be renewed," returned Richard, impatiently.

With her his gentleness and sympathy had been unfailing, but it was not to be denied that his present position fretted him. To be treated as a brother, and to be no brother; to be the rejected suitor of an heiress, and yet to be told he was her right hand! No wonder Richard's heart was sore; he was even aggrieved with Dr. Heriot for not perceiving more quickly the difficulties of his situation.

"If my father were in better health, she would go to him; she has said so more than once," he went on, more quietly. "It is easy to see that she does not understand my hints; and under the present circumstances it is impossible to speak more plainly. She wanted me to see Mr. Grantham, and when I refused she looked almost hurt."

"Yes, I see, she must be roused to do things herself. Don't be vexed about it, Richard, it will all come right, and you cannot expect her to see things as we do. I will have a little talk with her myself; if it comes to the worst I must constitute myself her man of business for the present," and Richard withdrew more satisfied.

Things were at a low ebb just now with Richard. Ethel's heiress-ship lay on him like a positive burden. The riches he despised rose up like a golden wall between him and his love. Oh, that she had been some poor orphaned girl, that in her lowliness he might have taken her to his heart and his father's home! What did either he or she want with these riches? He knew her well enough to be sure how she would dread the added responsibility they would bring. How often she had said to him during the last few weeks, "Oh, Richard, it is too much! it oppresses me terribly.

What am I to do with it all, and with myself?" and he had not answered her a word.

Dr. Heriot found his task easier than he expected. Ethel was unhappy enough to be slightly unreasonable. She felt herself aggrieved with Richard, and had misunderstood him.

"I suppose he has sent you to tell me that I must rouse myself," she said, with languid displeasure, when he had unfolded his errand. "He need not have troubled either himself or you. I have seen Mr. Grantham; he went away by the 2.50 train."

"I must say that I think you have done wisely," returned Dr. Heriot, much pleased. "No one, not even Richard, has a right to interfere in these matters. The Will is left so that your trustees will expect you to exert yourself. It seems a pity that you cannot refer to them!"

- "You know Mr. Molloy is dead."
- "Yes, and Sir William still in Canada. Yet, with an honest, straightforward man like Grantham, I think you might settle things without reference to any one. Richard is only sorry his father is so ailing."
  - "No, I could not trouble Mr. Lambert."
- "Richard has been so much about the house during your father's illness, that it seems natural

to refer to him. Well, he has an older head than many of us; but all the same you must understand his scruples."

"They have seemed to me far-fetched."

But, nevertheless, Ethel blushed a little as she spoke. A dim sense of Dr. Heriot's meaning had been dawning on her slowly, but she was loath to confess it. She changed the subject somewhat hastily, by asking after Mildred and the baby, and loading Dr. Heriot with loving messages. Nothing more was said about Richard until the close of the visit, when Dr. Heriot somewhat incautiously mentioned him again; but, as he told Mildred afterwards, he spoke advisedly.

"You will not let Richard think he is misunderstood?" he said, as he rose to take leave. "You know he is the last one to spare himself trouble, but he feels in your position that he must do nothing to compromise you."

"He will not have the opportunity," she returned, with brief haughtiness, and turning suddenly very crimson; but as she met Dr. Heriot's look of mild reproach, she melted.

"No—he is right, you are all of you quite right. I must exert myself, and try and care for the things that belonged to my darling father, only I shall be so lonely—so very lonely," and she covered her face with her hands.

Ethel met Richard with more than her usual kindness when she saw him next; her sweet, deprecating glance gave the young man a sorrowful pang.

"You need not have sent him to see me, Richard," she said, a little sadly. "I have been thoughtless, and hurt you. I—I will trouble no one but myself now."

"It was not the trouble, Ethel, you must know that," he returned, eagerly. "I wish I had the right to help you, but——"

His voice broke, and he dropped her hands. Perhaps he felt the time had not come to speak; perhaps an involuntary chill seized him as he thought of the little he had to offer her. His manner was very grave, almost reserved, during the rest of the visit; both of them were glad when a chance caller enabled Richard, without awkwardness, to take his leave.

After this, the young curate's visits grew rarer, and at last almost entirely ceased, and they only met at intervals at the vicarage or the Grey House, as Dr. Heriot's house was commonly called. Ethel made no complaint when she found she had

lost her friend, only Mildred noticed that she grew paler, and drooped visibly.

Mildred's tender heart bled for the lonely girl. Both she and her husband pleaded urgently that Ethel should leave her solitary home, and come to them for a little. But Ethel remained firm in her refusal.

"Your life is so perfect—so beautiful, Mildred," she said, once, when the latter had pressed her almost with tears in her eyes, "that I could not break in upon it with my sad face and moping ways. I should be more wretched than I am now."

"But at least you might have some lady with you; such perfect loneliness is good for no one. I cannot bear to think of you living in a corner of that great house all by yourself," returned Mildred, almost vexed with her obstinacy; and, indeed, the girl was very difficult to understand in those days.

"I have no friends but all of you dear people," she answered, in the saddest voice possible, "and I will not trouble you. I could not tolerate a stranger for a moment. Mildred, you must not be hurt with me; you do not know. I must have my way in this."

And though Mildred shook her wise head, and Dr. Heriot entered more than one laughing protest against such determined self-will, they were obliged to yield.

It was a strange life for so young a woman, and would have tried the strongest nerves; but the only wisdom that Ethel Trelawny showed was in not allowing herself an idle moment. The old dreaming habits were broken for ever, the fastidious choice of duties altogether forgotten; her days were chiefly devoted to her steward and tenants.

Richard, returning from his parochial visits to some outlying village, often met her, mounted on her beautiful brown mare, Zoê. Sometimes she would stop and give him her slim hand, and let him pet the mare and talk to her leaning on Zoê's glossy neck; but oftener a wave of the hand and a passing smile were her only greeting. Richard would come in stern and weary from these encounters, but he never spoke of them.

It was in the following spring that Roy and Polly were married.

Roy had been successful and had sold another picture, and as Mr. Lambert was disposed to be liberal to his younger son, there was no fear of opposition from Polly's guardian, even if he could have resisted the pleadings of the young people.

But, after all, there was no actual imprudence. If Roy failed to find a continuous market for his pictures, there was still no risk of positive starvation. Mr. Lambert had been quite willing to listen to Richard's representations, and to settle a moderate sum on Roy; for the present, at least, they would have enough and to spare, and the responsibility of a young wife would add a spur to Roy's genius.

Richard was not behind in his generosity. Already his frugality had amassed a few hundreds, half of which he placed in Roy's hands. spent a whole day in Wardour Street after that. A waggon, laden with old carved furniture and wonderful bric-à-brac, drew up before the Hollies. New crimson velvet curtains, and a carpet of splendid dye, found their way to the old studio. Polly hardly recognised it when she first set foot in the gorgeous apartment, and heaved a private sigh over the dear old shabby furniture. A little mother-of-pearl work-table and a Davenport of Indian wood stood in a corner appropriated to her use; a sleep-wooing couch and a softly-cushioned easy-chair were beside them. Polly cried a little with joy when the young husband pointed out the various contrivances for her comfort. All the pretty dresses Dr. Heriot had given her, and even Aunt Milly's thoughtful present of house-linen, which now lay in the new press, with a sweet smell of lavender breathing through every fold, were as nothing compared to Roy's gifts. After all, it was an ideal wedding; there was youth, health, and good looks, with plenty of honest love and good humour.

"I have perfect faith in Polly's good sense," Dr. Heriot had said to his wife, when the young people had driven away; "she has just the qualities Rex wants. I should not wonder if they turn out the happiest couple in the world, with the exception of ourselves, Milly, darling."

The wedding had taken place in June, and the time had now come round for the rush-bearing. The garden of Kirkleatham, the vicarage, and the Grey House had been visited by the young band of depredators. Dr. Heriot's glass-house had been rifled of its choicest blossoms; Mildred's bonnie boy, still in his nurse's arms, crowed and clapped his hands at the great white Annunciation lily that his mother had chosen for him to carry.

"You will not be late, John?" pleaded Mildred, as she followed him to the door, according to her invariable custom, on the morning of St. Peter's day; his wife's face was the last he saw when he quitted his home for his long day's work. At the

well-known click of the gate she would lay down her work, at whatever hour it was, and come smiling to meet him.

"Where are you, Milly, darling?" were always his first words, if she lingered a moment on her way.

"You will not be later than you can help?" she continued, brushing off a spot of dust on his sleeve. "You must see Arnold carry his lily, and Ethel will be there; and—and—" blushing and laughing, "you know I never can enjoy anything unless you are with me."

"Fie, Milly, darling, we ought to be more sensible after two years. We are old married folks now, but if it were not for making my wife vain,"—looking at the sweet, serene face so near his own,—"I might say the same. There, I must not linger if I am under orders. Good-bye, my two treasures," placing the great blue-eyed fellow in Mildred's arms.

When Mildred arrived at the park, under Richard's guardianship,—he had undertaken to drive her and his nephew,—they found Ethel at the old trysting-place amongst a host of other ladies, looking sad and weary.

She moved towards them, tall and shadowy, in her black dress.

"I am glad you are here," said Richard, in a low voice. "I thought the Delawares would persuade you, and you will be quiet enough at the vicarage."

"I thought I ought to do honour to my godson's first appearance in public," returned Ethel, stretching out her arms to the smiling boy.

Mildred and Dr. Heriot had begged Olive to fill the position of sponsor to the younger Arnold; but Olive had refused almost with tears.

"I am not good enough. Do not ask me," she had pleaded; and Mildred, knowing the girl's sad humours, had transferred the request to Ethel; her brother and Richard had stood with her.

Richard had no time to say more, for already the band had struck up that heralded the approach of the little rush-bearers; and he must take his place at the head of the procession with the other clergy.

She saw him again in church; he came down the chancel to receive the children's gay crowns. Ethel saw a broken lily lying amongst them on the altar afterwards. It struck her that his face looked somewhat sterner and paler than usual.

She was one of the invited guests at the vicarage; the Lamberts were this year up at the Hall; but later on in the afternoon they met in the Hall gardens: he came up at once and accosted her.

"All this is jarring on you terribly," he said,

with his old thoughtfulness, as he noticed her tired face.

"I should be glad to go home certainly; but I do not like to appear rude to the Delawares; the music is so noisy, and all those flitting dancers between the trees confuse one's head."

"Suppose we walk a little way from them," he returned, quietly. No one but a keen observer could have read a determined purpose under that quietness of his; Ethel's worn face, her changed manners were driving him desperate; the time had come that he would take his fate between his hands, like a man; so he told himself, as they walked side by side.

They had sauntered into the tree-bordered walk, leading to the old summer-house in the meadows. As they reached it, Ethel turned to him with a new sort of timidity in her face and voice.

"I am not tired, Richard—not very tired, I mean. I would rather go back to the others."

"We will go back presently. Ethel, I want to speak to you—I must speak to you; this sort of thing cannot go on any longer."

"What do you mean?" she asked, turning very pale, but not looking at him.

"That we cannot go on any longer avoiding each other like this. You have avoided me very

often lately—have you not, Ethel?" speaking very gently.

"I do not know; you are so changed—you are not like yourself, Richard," she faltered.

"How can I be like myself?" he answered, with a sudden passion in his voice that made her tremble; "how am I to forget that I am a poor curate, and you your father's heiress; that I have fifties where you have thousands? Oh, Ethel, if you were only poor," his tone sinking into pathos.

"What have riches or poverty to do with it?" she asked, still averting her face from him.

"Do you not see? Can you not understand?" he returned, eagerly. "If you were poor, would it not make my wooing easier? I have loved you how long, Ethel? Is it ten or eleven years? I was a boy of fourteen when I loved you first, and I have never swerved from my allegiance."

"Never!" in a low voice.

"Never! When you called me Cœur de Lion, I swore then, lad as I was, that I would one day win my Berengaria. You have been the dearest thing in life to me, ever since I first saw you; and now that I should lose my courage over these pitiful riches! Oh, Ethel, it is hard—hard, just when a little hope was dawning on me that one day you might be able to return my affection. Was I

wrong in that belief?" trying to obtain a glimpse of the face now shielded by her hands.

"Whatever I may feel, I know we are equals," she returned, evasively.

"In one sense we are not," he answered, sadly; "a woman ought not to come laden with riches to overwhelm her husband. I am a clergyman—a gentleman, and therefore I fear to ask you to be my wife."

"Was Berengaria poor?" in a voice nearly inaudible; but he heard it, and his handsome face flushed with sudden emotion.

"Do you mean you are willing to be my Berengaria? Oh, Ethel, my own love, this is too much. Can you really care for me enough?"

"I have cared for you ever since you were so good to me in my trouble," she said, turning her glowing countenance, that he might read the truth of her words; "but you have made me very unhappy lately, Richard."

"What could I do?" he answered, almost incoherent with joy. "I thought you were treating me like a brother, and I feared to break in upon your grief. Oh, if you knew what I have suffered."

"I understood, and that only made me love you all the more," she replied, softly. "You have been winning my heart slowly ever since that evening—you remember it?—in the kitchen garden."

"When you almost broke my heart, was I likely to forget it, do you think?"

"You startled me. I had only a little love, but it has been growing ever since. Richard!" with her old archness, "you will not refuse to see the lawyers now?"

He coloured slightly, and his bright look clouded; but this time Ethel did not misunderstand him.

"Dear Richard, you cannot hate the riches more than I do, but they must never be mentioned again between us; they must be sacred to us as my father's gift. I know you will help me to do what is right and good with them," she continued, in her winning way; "they are talents we must use, and not abuse."

"You have rebuked me, my dearest," returned Richard, tenderly; "it is I who have been faithless and a coward. I will accept the charge you have given me; and thank God at the same time for your noble heart."

So the long-desired gift had come into Richard Lambert's keeping, and the woman he had loved from boyhood had consented to be his wife.

The young master of Kirkleatham ruled well and vol. III. 58

wisely, and Ethel proved a noble helpmeet. When some years later his father died, and he became vicar of Kirkby Stephen, the parish had reason to bless the strong heart and head, and the munificent hands that were never weary of giving. And "our vicar" rivalled even the good doctor's popularity.

And what of Olive, and Hugh Marsden? Mildred's words had come true.

There were long lonely years before Hugh Marsden, years of incessant toil and Herculean labour, which should stoop his broad shoulders and streak his dark hair with grey, when men should speak of the noble missionary, Hugh Marsden, and of the incredible work carried forward by him beyond the pale of civilisation.

There was no limit to his endurance, no lack of cheerfulness in his efforts, they said; no labour was too great, no scheme too impracticable, no possibility too remote for the energies of that arduous soul.

Hugh Marsden only smiled at their praise; he was free and unfettered; he had no wife or child; danger would touch him alone. What should hinder him from undertaking any enterprise in his Master's service? But wherever he went in his lonely hours, or in his long sunshiny converse with

others, he ever remained faithful to his memory of Olive; she was still to him the purest ideal of womanhood. At times her face, with its cloudy dark hair and fathomless eyes, would haunt him with strange persistence. Whole lines and passages of her poetry would return to his memory, stirring him with subtle sweetness and vague longings for home.

And Olive, how was it with her during those years of home duty, so patiently, so unselfishly performed? While she achieved her modest fame, and carried it so meekly, had she any remembrance of Hugh Marsden?

"I remember all the more that I try to forget," she said once when Mildred had put this question to her. "Now I shall try no more, for I know I cannot forget him." And again there had been that sadness in her voice. But she never spake of him voluntarily even to Mildred, but hid in her quiet soul many a secret yearning. They were separated thousands of miles, yet his honest face and voice were often present with her, and never nearer than when she whispered prayers for the friend who had once loved her.

And neither of them knew that the years would bring them together again; that one day, Hugh Marsden, broken in health, and craving for a sight of his native land, should be sent home on an important mission, to find Olive free and unfettered, and waiting for him in her brother's home.

THE END.

			i

•

.



